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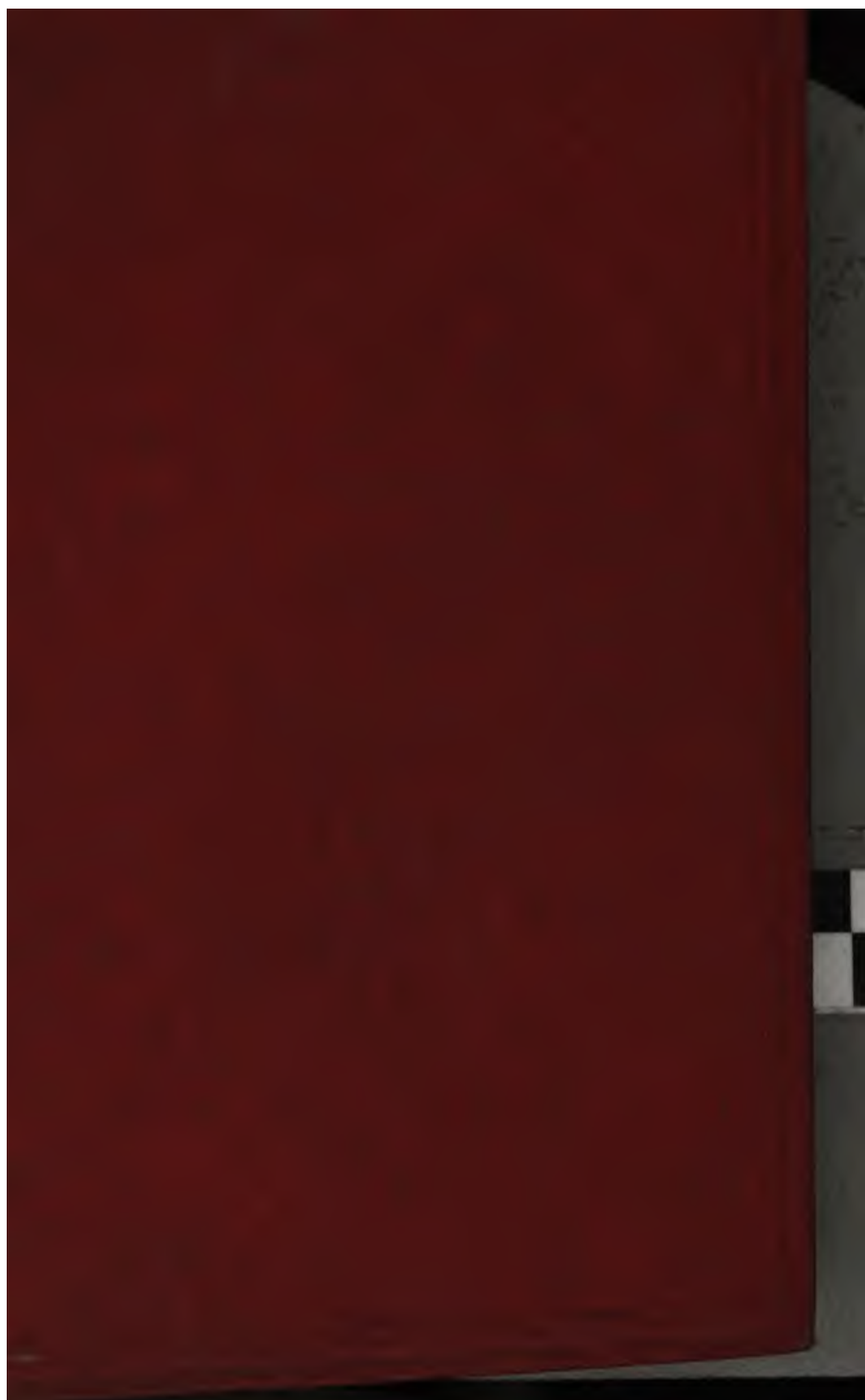
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**ANNE WARWICK.**

**VOL. I.**



# ANNE WARWICK.

BY

GEORGINA M. CRAIK,

AUTHOR OF

"MILDRED," "FAITH UNWIN'S ORDEAL,"

&c. &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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# ANNE WARWICK.

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## CHAPTER I.

THE sun was shining hotly in the old Hall garden, and Miss Warwick was standing in the full blaze of it. She was a woman who never shrank from sunshine. Perhaps she was a little vain that she could always bear its heat and brightness, and never gain a freckle on her clear, soft cheek.

“My dear,” she was saying, “you are talking utter nonsense.”

She was speaking to her cousin, Lucy Carstairs, who was seated under a tree, in



an easy garden-chair, with an ample white umbrella above her head. The two girls had been discussing some subject together for the last ten minutes, and Miss Carstairs had apparently got sad, and a little peevish, over the discussion. (As for Anne Warwick, she was never peevish, and rarely sad.)

"I am not talking nonsense," Miss Carstairs replied. "I wish I were. But everybody knows that it is true. And it is not that I envy you, Anne: God knows I don't do that. I don't envy you, only—oh, if I could give up everything I have in the world, to be just half what you are!"

"If you could do such a thing, you would make the worst bargain you ever made in your life."

"Yes, it is easy to say that. Of course *you* say it. Women who are pretty always seem to think that they must talk in that way. But, talk as you please, you know

that, being what you are, you are better off than I am a thousand times !”

“Lucy, you are a little jealous goose,” Miss Warwick said.

“Do you think I don’t know that ?”

“You ought to be ashamed of being jealous.”

“I am not ashamed of it.”

“If you could change places with me to-morrow, it wouldn’t make you happy. You think that you don’t care for being rich. I don’t know anybody who is more dependent upon riches. What would you do without servants to wait upon you, and a fine house to live in, and pretty delicate things about you? You would like to get up in the dark on cold Winter mornings, would you not?—and help the housemaid to make the beds,—and look after the cold mutton,—and pore over the weekly bills? You would enjoy these little amusements

amazingly? You would like to have to make your own gowns, and mend your own stockings, and turn the ribbon on your hat? You would like to tramp out on foot in the mud and rain, and think twice before you bought yourself a new waterproof? Lucy, you wouldn't lead the life I lead—no, not to find yourself the prettiest girl in Wiltshire."

"That is all you know."

"Well, I do know that."

"You *don't* know it. You have no right to say you know it. And if you were in my place—if you had what I have, and wanted what I want—you would feel exactly as I am feeling now!"

Miss Carstairs spoke passionately and bitterly, and started up from her seat at her last words, as if she could not any longer bear the idle repose of her attitude. She was a delicate, sallow-looking girl, shorter

than her cousin, and wholly without either her cousin's grace or brilliancy.

"My dear, what is the use of us talking as if we could change either ourselves or our fortunes?" Anne said quietly. "I think we are very like a couple of children when we do it, and you are the most foolish, because you get angry. Come in, and don't let us be silly any more. Put a brighter face upon the matter, Lucy. It is four o'clock, and I must be going home. If you look at me as sourly as this I won't come back again."

"Don't say such a thing! How have you the heart to say such a thing?" the other cried reproachfully. And then Anne laughed, and put her arm about her cousin's neck.

"Poor Lucy!" she said to herself ten minutes afterwards, as she was walking home. She was thinking about the talk



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"You? No—I should think not! How could they?"

"But I deserve pity quite as much as Lucy does."

"I am afraid you will hardly persuade any one of that."

"I had a dreadful fit of faceache last week."

"Had you? I am very sorry to hear it."

"Your tone doesn't sound as if you were sorry a bit."

"Well, you are speaking of something that is past, you know."

"How do you know that it is past? My face may be aching, for anything you can tell, at this moment."

"Yes, it may be,—but I don't think it is."

"You have no right to assume that. You are always assuming things. It is a very dangerous habit, Mr. Hilton."

"If it is a dangerous habit, I suppose I must try to break myself of it—only I didn't know that it was one I indulged in."

"Yes, you do. You very often indulge in it."

"If you say I do it must be so, I suppose."

"No, it need not be so because I say it. You must not believe everything that people say to you. It is a great mistake to be very credulous."

"But I may believe everything that *you* say."

"Mr. Hilton, you can't come any farther with me, because I am going across the fields, and you know that horse of yours can't go across fields."

"I don't know why he shouldn't."

"Mr. Yates would make you know why he shouldn't if he were to meet you taking him."



"I have a good mind to run the risk."

"Well, you can run the risk, if you like, only *I* don't mean to run it too, so I will say good morning to you."

"Why do you want to be home in such a hurry that you take this short cut? It is a very nice afternoon for walking."

"Yes; and a very nice afternoon for riding too. I hope you will have a pleasant ride."

"But you don't answer my question."

"What question did you put to me?"

"Why are you in such a hurry to be home?"

"Because my father expects me."

"He is writing his sermon for to-morrow."

"Very likely. And he will want me to read it to."

"God bless me! does he read his sermons to you?"

"Yes, and I correct the theology, you know."

"You must do that very well."

"I think I do. I have a natural talent for criticism."

"I don't doubt that."

"You seem to me to speak with unnecessary acrimony, Mr. Hilton."

"I speak with acrimony, perhaps. Whether or not it is unnecessary is a matter of opinion."

"It ought not to be a matter of opinion. Acrimony is a very bad thing."

"Then why do you try to arouse it in people?"

"Why do I try to arouse it? I never did such a thing in my life!"

"I think you have."

"Never!"

"You may have done it unconsciously."

"Then it is no fault of mine."

"I did not say it was your fault. But cannot you conceive how you do it sometimes?"

"No."

"Not when you—when you drive people—beside themselves?"

"I never drive people beside themselves. There is five o'clock striking, Mr. Hilton. Good-bye."

"I am afraid I have offended you?"

"What, by being so keenly alive to my talent for criticism? Oh no, I don't take offence so easily. But I have put out my hand twice, and you take no more notice of me than if I were begging for a halfpenny. Will you please to shake hands with me or not?"

And then Mr. Hilton laughed, and they shook hands and parted.

As Anne Warwick walked on across the fields, there was perhaps not quite the same

look in her face that there had been before she met Mr. Hilton ; the colour on her cheek was a little brighter, her step was a little quicker. The meeting had pleased her possibly ; as she walked on thinking, a half-smile came once or twice to her lips,—until, chancing to turn her head a little, she suddenly saw her companion's retreating figure rapidly riding back along the road whence she had come. His horse's head was turned towards the Hall, and as the girl saw it a little contraction came quickly on her brow. " So he is going there," she said to herself, and the red lips set suddenly, and perhaps unconsciously, in rather a hard line. Nor did they soften again, though after a minute more she broke into a little contemptuous laugh.

I said that Miss Warwick met two acquaintances before she reached her own house. She encountered the second one

when she was not more than a stone's cast from the Parsonage. He came along the main road, and, passing her by in the first instance, merely raised his hat, but the next moment turned back and spoke to her.

"I rather wanted to see your father. Do you know if he is engaged?" he said abruptly.

"He is always a little busy on Saturdays, but of course he would have time to see you," she answered.

"Shall I come in now?"

"If it suits you."

And then they walked on together. Her first companion had been a young man of five or six-and-twenty; this one was a few years older, and of the two a good deal the most grave-looking and staid. He had not at all the appearance of a subject for Miss Warwick to whet her wit upon; and Miss Warwick, to do her justice, appeared

perfectly aware of that, and during the few minutes that they remained together, conducted herself with the most perfect propriety and decorum.

"Have you been walking far?" the gentleman asked.

"No. I have only been as far as the Hall," she said.

"I have not seen Mr. Carstairs for a long while—I hope he is well?"

"I don't think he is very well. He seems to get so feeble."

"He is not an old man."

"No; he is only sixty. But he looks old for that—does he not?"

"There is a want of vitality in him."

"Yes; and so there is in Lucy. It is such a sleepy house."

"Very."

"Nothing ever goes on there."

"No—not much, I suppose."

The subject did not seem to interest her companion. There was a moment or two's silence; and then—"Do you know if your father is going to Hampton on Monday?" he asked; and they began to talk about some meeting that was to be held in the town at the beginning of the following week.

The Parsonage door was standing open, and Miss Warwick went through the hall to the study, and ushered their visitor in.

"Papa, here is Mr. Faulkner," she said; and then, as her father rose to greet him, she went up to her own room, and left the two men together.

I do not suppose she was thinking much of Mr. Faulkner as she stood before her glass smoothing her bright hair. Her short *rencontre* with him had given her nothing to occupy her thoughts. It was not of Mr. Faulkner, but of some one very unlike him,

that she was musing, as she stood before the glass with that half proud, half sensitive curl upon her lips.



## CHAPTER II.

“**M**R. FAULKNER will stay to dinner, Anne,” Mr. Warwick said.

“Oh !” replied Anne, and glanced for a moment at the clock, where the hands were pointing to a quarter to six.

There was nothing but cold beef for dinner, she was thinking to herself. “But I don’t suppose he will mind. I dare say he has only cold meat sometimes at his own house,” she said.

So, having made this reflection, she dismissed the matter from her mind, and she and her father and Mr. Faulkner presently ate their cold beef together.

"It's warm— isn't it?" the Vicar said. "I think we had better have our coffee presently in the verandah, Anne."

"I want to build a verandah at the south side of my house," Mr. Faulkner said. "There used to be one when I was a boy. I have always thought that this verandah of yours here is very pretty."

"Yes, yes—it's pretty enough; it's the sort of thing for a small place like this. But yours will have to be something much more imposing."

"I don't think verandahs should ever be imposing," Anne struck in.

"Why not, my dear? Now, for my taste, a stone verandah, with pillars—I've seen the sort of thing in Italy—— Ah! we should copy some of those Italian houses," said the Vicar, wagging his head.

"Yes, I suppose I must have something in stone," Mr. Faulkner said. "Herbert

was showing me some plans the other day."

"What a first-rate man Herbert is! Do you know, Faulkner, I always wonder that, with such a place as Sutton to work upon, you don't meddle a little more with brick and mortar."

"Why, you don't want me to make the house larger, do you?"

Mr. Faulkner asked this with a laugh.

"Well, no—you needn't make it larger; but you might pull down part of it and build it up again."

"What would be the use of doing that?"

"The use? Why, you would beautify it, you know. It wouldn't be much a question of use, I dare say; but it would give you an amazing deal of pleasure—at least, I know it would give a great deal to me."

"If you are so much interested in

building, you had better take this verandah in hand."

"That is not a bad idea."

"You and Miss Warwick might come over some morning, and see what sort of thing it would be best to have. Will you come?" he turned and asked Anne.

"I should like to come," she said.

"If you would take lunch with me—What day would suit you? Are you engaged on Tuesday?"

"On Tuesday? Let me think. Well, no," said the Vicar. "Tuesday would suit me very well."

"Then do come on Tuesday."

"I would have it run the whole length of the drawing-room," Mr. Warwick said. "In fact, all along that side of the house; and, it strikes me, if you were to throw out an oriel window, or—wait a moment—let me see——"

Mr. Warwick had got fitted with a subject to his mind, and he talked upon no other till they rose from table. Neither of the men was a wine-drinker, and when Anne left the dining-room they left it with her, and all went out together into the garden, where the sun was glowing red before his setting on the ivied walls, and the smooth-cut lawn, and the scarlet geraniums in their beds. It was a straggling, gabled green old house, damp with too many trees about it, and lying low; but in Summer time, at any rate, and in sunshine, very pretty and picturesque. "Not a good house—not a good house, by any means," the Vicar always said, shaking his head when people liked it; but yet, though he shook his head, and in spite of his love for pulling down and rebuilding, Mr. Warwick, too, had a tender feeling for the old walls within which he had lived for five and twenty years.

"They will have to build a new Parsonage some of these days, but this one must last my time, I suppose," he would say, glancing his eyes upwards with a look of critical disparagement in them that was half, or more than half, assumed.

They drank their coffee in the verandah, and then Miss Warwick left the other two, and went away to water her flowers. The two men, rambling about the garden presently in the dusk, met her coming towards them with her watering-pot, and Mr. Faulkner, taking it out of her hand, left his companion and joined her.

"Have you been watering all this time? You must be tired," he said.

"Oh, I have nearly finished," she answered cheerfully.

"What more have you to do?"

"Only those two beds nearest the house."

And then he went and watered them for

her. When the waterpot that she had been carrying was emptied, she took him to the pump in the yard, and he refilled it. She was a little shy of taking him to the pump, for Mr. Faulkner was rather an important person, and one not at all likely, at his own house, to be engaged in pumping water, and carrying it about his grounds; but when he said to her, "Where do you get your water?" what could she do but show the place to him? So she took him to the pump, and Mr. Faulkner, to give him his due, filled his waterpot with an appearance of perfect unconcern, and looked as unconscious of being engaged in an occupation that was beneath his dignity as Anne could have done herself.

"Thank you very much; we need not do any more now," Miss Warwick said, when the second can was emptied.

"What a beautiful sky!" said Mr. Faulk-

ner, ceasing from his labours. "The colours must be very fine down there, if we could see them a little better."

"We can see sunsets beautifully from the gate," Anne said.

Upon which Mr. Faulkner at once walked down to the gate, and after a moment or two's consideration, Miss Warwick followed him. Her father had gone indoors, and she could not leave her visitor to ramble about alone, so she followed him, and they stood at the gate together.

"It is very beautiful," said Mr. Faulkner.

"Very beautiful," echoed Anne.

And then they leant over the gate in silence, with their faces to the west.

Miss Warwick did not know Mr. Faulkner very well, and did not care very much to be leaning over a gate with him, but he was her father's friend, and so for her father's sake she was in the habit of treating



him with an amount of consideration and respect that I am obliged to confess she did not always display towards persons to whom she was indifferent.

"There is nobody I have a greater regard for than Faulkner," her father would often say. "I don't think a man lives with more sterling good in him."

"No, I suppose not," Anne would answer absently.

"He never disappoints you. He makes no kind of profession; but I never knew a more trustworthy, generous-natured, honourable, clear-headed fellow."

"Yes, I suppose that is true," Anne would say indifferently again. And then she would give a little yawn, perhaps, or begin to count the stitches in her embroidery. She never questioned Mr. Faulkner's excellence, only it was a subject that did not interest her. She was glad her

father liked his friend : she liked him too, in a way, but in her heart she thought he was dull. He was slow and deliberate, and Anne, who was as quick and lithe as an eel herself, had not much sympathy with slowness. And then, too, Mr. Faulkner was grave, and Anne had a bad trick of talking a great deal of nonsense, and in her heart was a little afraid of gravity.

She leant over the gate and looked at the sky, and Mr. Faulkner leant over the gate too. She was thinking to herself, "I wonder if he is not going soon. It must be almost nine o'clock, and I am sure Papa is busy." And then she began to think, "I wonder how long Mr. Hilton stayed at the Hall to-day, and what he talked about to Lucy! She would be so happy when she saw him coming (I know exactly how it would be), and all the time he stayed she would be in a fool's paradise, and now by

this time—long before this, perhaps—Oh, it is too bad, it makes me angry!” the girl cried suddenly to herself; and then something hotter than the reflection of the sunset started up into her face.

“This would make a good picture,” Mr. Faulkner said quietly, breaking the silence in a deliberate voice. “I would take the sky a little here to the south, where it is clear. Look how finely those oaks stand out against it.”

“Yes,” said Anne listlessly, glancing with her bodily eyes at the oaks, but with the eyes of her mind not seeing oaks at all, but something quite different.

“I should like to paint it.”

“You don’t paint, do you?”

Miss Warwick asked this absently, almost in the same mechanical way as, supposing Mr. Faulkner had remarked, “How delightful it must be to soar in the air like a lark,”

she might have asked, "You don't fly, do you?" uttering the first words that came to her lips, as we do when we are dreaming.

"You don't paint, do you?" she said, indifferently, still thinking of her cousin and Mr. Hilton.

"No, not now," Mr. Faulkner said.

"Did you ever?"

"I used to spend a great deal of time in painting once."

"Oh!" said Miss Warwick slowly, awakening from her reverie.

"When I was a boy I had a passionate desire to be an artist."

"Dear me!" said Anne. And as she said this she turned round and looked at her companion with some curiosity. If she could have spoken the thought that came into her mind I am afraid she would have exclaimed, "You are not my idea of an artist in the least." But she happily did not

say this. She only ran her eyes over Mr. Faulkner's face and figure with a look in them of unmistakable surprise.

"Then why—why did you not make yourself one?" she asked, after a moment or two's silence.

"Because my father was so strongly against it. I had no power of studying seriously when I was a lad."

"But you could now?"

"Yes; but I am afraid I am too old now."

"Are you?"

"Possibly I might not be too old if I could give all my time to it. But I have a good many other things to do."

"Yes, I suppose you have. That is the worst of being rich."

"So I sometimes think." Mr. Faulkner said this with a laugh.

"It seems to me, if I were you"—Miss Warwick had recovered herself, and had

begun like a rational woman to give her mind to the matter that was before her,—“it seems to me that if I were you, and really wanted to paint,” she said thoughtfully, still leaning upon the gate, but turning her face, not to the sky, but to Mr. Faulkner—“that I would set somebody to look after things here. I would give everything into some good person’s hands, I mean,—and go away, perhaps for three or four years, and work with all my might. Suppose you went to Rome. Just think of all you might do in those three or four years, if you painted all day! It would be delightful, I think.”

“Yes, few things would be more delightful.”

“Why don’t you do it, then?”

“You speak as if you wanted me to settle to do it this minute.” Mr. Faulkner laughed again as he said this.

"I think, if the case were mine, I *would* settle to do it this minute. I never can understand, when one thinks about a good thing, why there should be any hesitation in doing it."

"You would like wishes to be executed like flashes of lightning, you mean?"

"Well, it would be better to execute them so than to deliberate about them till all their freshness and delightfulness is gone."

"Yes; but there is a middle way that is better than either over-haste or over-deliberation. Why not choose that?"

"We can't choose the best things always. We can't always be right, you know."

"And hasty action is at any rate more interesting than action that is slow, you think? Well, that is a common feeling, at any rate, whether it is a wise one or not. But I am afraid you are finding it cold."

And it is getting late too. Shall we come in?" Mr. Faulkner said.

They walked back to the house, where there was a light shining from the study window. They went a few steps in silence, and then Anne said a little quickly (she was a vain creature, you perceive, and did not like her opinions to be held in contempt)—

"I don't mean, of course, that one ought to act without thinking. I am not so very foolish as to say that. But some people are so *very* slow and undecided. You never can get them to make up their minds; they go up and down like a pair of scales."

"Yes, a great many people do that."

"I don't think that indecision and excessive cautiousness are any signs of wisdom."

"No more than haste and heedlessness are."



“ People are very cautious sometimes and very stupid.”

“ Yes; and sometimes very incautious and very silly.”

Miss Warwick gave a quick glance at her companion, but her companion was looking gravely before him; so, though the colour came for a moment to her face, she only gave a little cough, and closed her lips; and then they walked the rest of the way to the house without speaking any more.

It was only a few steps. When they had entered the hall Mr. Faulkner said, “ I will go and say good night to your father.” So he passed on to the study, and she went into the drawing-room by herself.

She sat down idly in the dark at first, supposing that he would come back in a few minutes to shake hands with her; but he did not come back, so presently she lighted a candle and sat down at the piano,

and began to sing ; and she was still singing a quarter of an hour afterwards, when her father and Mr. Faulkner together came into the room.

At their entrance she broke off her song, and Mr. Faulkner came up to her and held out his hand.

“Don’t let me disturb you. I have merely come to wish you good night,” he said shortly.

“Good night,” she answered, in the same tone.

Was she by possibility a little piqued that he did not care to stay and listen to her singing ? Most people liked to listen to it, for she sang well ; and Mr. Faulkner had been a good deal abroad, and knew something about music, it was supposed. But he merely shook hands with her, and quitted the room ; and then Anne was left once more to her song and her solitude.

## CHAPTER III.

ALTHOUGH Anne Warwick and Lucy Carstairs were cousins, there was, as you will have seen, a great inequality in their worldly positions. Five and twenty years ago Mr. Warwick had come to be the clergyman at King's Croft. He was a young man then, and he brought a sister with him who was younger than himself; and Mr. Carstairs, of King's Croft Hall, fell presently in love with this girl, and they were married. So the brother, who also married in time, continued to live at the Parsonage on a modest income of four hundred a year, and his sister went to the

Hall and became a rich woman. She was dead now—she had been dead for many years; and Mr. Warwick's wife also was dead. Between the two brothers-in-law there had never been any great intimacy, but their two children had been brought up very much together, and were fond of each other. "They have managed to divide the world's goods pretty equally between them," people would say sometimes when they spoke of the two girls. "If the one has got all the money, the other has got all the beauty." "And all the brains too," some admirer of Miss Warwick's would occasionally add; for Anne was very quick and bright, and, it must be confessed, when they were together, cast her quieter cousin a good deal into the shade. There were some persons, however, who, even allowing both beauty and wit to Miss Warwick, thought the division an unfair one. "What busi-

ness has a handsome woman to be penniless? If this one had only the half of her cousin's fortune—!" Mr. Hilton especially, just at present, had got into a habit of saying impatiently to himself. And, in truth, the matter troubled him more seriously than you would have thought so immaterial a business should.

Frederick Hilton had not been acquainted very long with King's Croft: indeed, he was not a resident in the place at all, though during the last year or two he had come a good deal about it, and had seen a good deal both of Anne and her cousin. He was a barrister in London, but his duties there appeared to be of a not very exacting nature; and Wiltshire was only a three hours' journey from the Temple, and his sister's house near King's Croft was a very pleasant one to stay at. His sister was a Mrs. Osborne, the young wife of a not very

young, but very wealthy, man. She had married her husband two years ago, almost professedly because he was an excellent match ; for the Hiltons, who were a good family, but not rich, made a point of always marrying money. Three daughters and one son had already done what their friends expected of them in this way admirably ; and Frederick Hilton was the sole remaining member of the house who was still unprovided with a wife.

“You ought really to think seriously about marrying, Fred,” Mrs. Osborne had begun to say to him, with an air of management, almost as soon as she had put off her own orange blossoms ; “you will never feel settled till you have a house of your own. Now, as soon as we have been a week or two at home, you must come and stay with us.”

“Very well,” Mr. Hilton had answered.  
“I shall be very happy.”

And he had gone accordingly, and had paid, not only that first visit to Mrs. Osborne, but various subsequent visits ; and Mrs. Osborne, with sisterly good-nature, had brought him face to face with every marriageable and well-dowered young lady within a circle of ten miles ; but yet, at the two years' end, Mr. Hilton was still a bachelor.

“My dear Fred, it is all your own fault,” his sister would often exclaim to him, with vexation. “What is the good of introducing you to people if you won't make use of your opportunities ?”

“There is Bella Wrixon,” she said one day—“I am certain she would have you, if you asked her.”

“But I haven't the least intention of asking her,” Mr. Hilton replied. “What,—marry a stunted, vulgar, thick-lipped girl like that !”

"She will have a thousand a year, Fred."

"I don't care if she had ten thousand ; I am not going to marry her. Come, I am willing to sacrifice a good deal, but, by George ! a man must have his wife look like a lady, at least."

"Well, Lydia Ryall looks like a lady. You can't say that *she* is vulgar, at any rate."

"No—Lydia is not vulgar ; but she has got a brain like a grasshopper. Besides, she wouldn't have me."

"You don't know that."

"She likes that fellow Repton."

"Oh, nonsense ! If you began to pay her a little attention, she would give up Repton fast enough."

"I'll be hanged if I pay her any attention !"

"Now, Fred !"

"Upon my word, Laura, I can't go



making love to a woman who turns me sick. I wouldn't live with Lydia Ryall if she had a mint of money."

"You are very provoking, Fred."

"You must really allow me to have a reasonable amount of liking."

"Oh! I know the meaning of all this."

"What do you know?"

Mr. Hilton asked this question defiantly, but a little consciously too.

"Of course I know what you have got in your head."

"I have not got anything in my head."

"And it is such nonsense, Fred—you know it is such nonsense. How could you possibly marry that girl?"

"I don't know whom you are talking about."

"You do know whom I am talking about. You know I am talking about Anne Warwick."

"I don't expect to marry her."

"Then why do you behave as you do? You go wherever you have a chance of seeing her; you never keep away from her when she is in the same room with you."

"She is the only girl in the place who is worth speaking to."

"That is nonsense; there are as nice girls here as you will find anywhere. But, even if it were true, that is no excuse for your going on in the way you do. You are most imprudent, Fred, to follow any girl about like that, when you don't mean to marry her."

"When I don't *mean* to marry her!" Mr. Hilton's face got very red as he echoed this sentence. "What a way that is to speak in! As if I had any power of marrying her!"

"Well, that is just it—that is just what I say. You have no power of marrying her,

and therefore you are behaving most unwisely."

"I don't see that I am unwise."

"Now, really, Fred! Why, the mere fact of your saying this shows that your head is quite turned about her. You don't see that you are unwise! Why, what girl in the world do you think would be such a fool as to have you as long as you go philandering after another woman? And if you don't marry—I mean, if you don't marry some one with money—what in the world do you mean to do?"

"Oh! I shall marry somebody with money in good time, I daresay."

"I don't think that is so certain by any means. You seem to imagine that girls with money have nothing to do but to fall into your arms."

"It seems to me that that is rather what *you* think. I am sure you talk about these

girls—Lydia, and Bella, and the rest of them—as if I had nothing to do but to stretch out my hand and take any one I wanted. Now, if it comes to that——” And then Mr. Hilton abruptly paused.

“Well, what are you going to say?”

“If it comes to a question of taking, it is odd, I mean, that you say nothing about the only one I *might* take.”

“I am afraid to say anything, Fred—you catch me up so. I have been afraid to say a word about Miss Carstairs.”

“I don’t know why you should be afraid.”

“If I let you see that I want you to do anything, that seems to be quite reason enough for your not doing it.”

“It is absurd to say that, Laura.”

“*Of course* I should like you to marry Miss Carstairs.”

“Well, I suppose that is what it will come to.”

"My dear Fred, I am delighted to hear it!"

"I wish *I* was delighted to think it. I think it is rather a shame, for my own part."

"I don't see that. She knows you admire her cousin, and if she should be willing to have you, in spite of that, I think you will be acting quite honestly and openly."

"What,—though I shall have to tell her a pack of lies when I propose to her?"

"I don't know what you mean by a pack of lies."

"I shall have to tell her that I care for her more than I do for Miss Warwick."

"Why need you say anything about Miss Warwick?"

"Well, *I* am not likely to introduce her name; but do you think *she* won't?"

"I don't see why she should. I think it would be very indelicate in her to do it."

Why, good gracious, before I accepted Mr. Osborne, do you think I asked him if he cared for anybody else more than for me?"

"The two cases are quite different. You had no reason to suppose that Mr. Osborne cared for anybody else more than he did for you. But Lucy Carstairs knows——"

"Well, what does she know?"

"She knows enough to make her jealous."

"Then it is most absurd of you to give her cause to be jealous. Really, I have no patience with you, Fred. You are just like a child. You never exercise any self-denial."

"Do I not? If I did not, do you think, before this, I would not have asked Anne Warwick to marry me?" And the blood came again to the young man's face. "She is the only woman I care a straw for!" he cried, hotly. "If I thought she would have

me, and I could scrape together an income of—of five hundred a year,—by Jove! I would ask her to-morrow.”

“Well, you *can't* scrape five hundred a year together, and she has not a penny, so asking her is out of the question. Now be rational, Fred, and don't throw your chances away. My dear boy, do listen to reason. Go and call at the Hall this afternoon. You have not been there since you dined with them on Tuesday. You ought to go in common politeness. Go, Fred, and see if you can't be civil to her.”

“I can go if you like, but I shan't be more civil to her than I always am,” Mr. Hilton answered ungraciously. But he had his horse saddled presently, and rode up to the Hall; and it was on the afternoon of this day that he had overtaken Anne as she was walking home, and had shown in the conversation that had taken place between

them how admirably he had profited by the advice he had just received.

Did the keen-witted girl know the sort of man that the young lawyer was, as she bandied her quick words with him, and let him get dazzled by her cleverness and her beauty? I think she had a pretty shrewd suspicion; she saw the double game that he was playing well enough; she had at the bottom of her heart a sort of contempt for him. And yet she liked him too; had one or two things in him been different she might have loved him. At moments when she was most in charity with him she used to say that it was not his own fault that he was worldly and untrue; his education, and not his nature, had made him that. She might have been right, perhaps; at any rate, she cared for him enough to like to think she was. "He will marry Lucy, and he ought not to marry her. But how can one



help it?" she would say to herself, with a sage, grave look on her young face. "If *he* does not marry her, I suppose some one else will who cares as little about her as he does. So why should she not have him, if having him will make her happy?"

But yet the prospect of this marriage was a thorn in Miss Warwick's flesh, and she did not like it, and was troubled in her mind because of it; and often, when she thought of the whole business (and, to tell the truth, she rarely forgot it about this time for ten minutes from morning to night), she was angry with Mr. Hilton about it, and with her cousin, and with herself. Did she want her lover to go to another woman? Did she want that other woman to like her lover? Did she want to care for a man who loved her with less than all his heart? The best of us are self-deceived so easily, and Miss Warwick believed that the part of the matter

that vexed her most was the thought that her cousin ran a risk of becoming the wife of a man who did not care for her ; but I do not think that in reality it was that point that gave the keenest annoyance to her. It was her own part of the business that fretted her most, I suspect—the hurt to her own vanity, the little hurt (I think it was only a little one) to her own heart.

“Mr. Hilton was saying yesterday——” began Miss Carstairs to her cousin, with assumed carelessness, on the morning after Anne had met him. “He called after you went away,” she put in, parenthetically.

“Yes, I know. I met him. He walked part of the way home with me,” Anne answered, in the same indifferent tone ; and then next moment, as she saw the painful colour come into the other’s sallow cheek, she hated herself for what she had said. “Why need I have told her ? As if I

wanted to triumph over her!" she thought remorsefully to herself. But of course the mischief was done then, and she could not undo it; and the other forgot the thing she had been going to say, and turned away her head, with another little arrow added to the many that had already pierced her heart. She had thought that she had had the whole of her lover for that one little hour—and she was wrong. As he rode up to her gate it was of Anne that he had been thinking, and not of her; while he talked to her, the echo of Anne's voice had been in his ears. I think it was hard for her—. Anne, in the pride and glory of her beauty, could scarcely know how hard.

"We are going to lunch on Tuesday at Sutton," Miss Warwick had been telling her cousin. "Papa wants to pull down Mr. Faulkner's house, and so Mr. Faulkner is going to take us to look at its capabilities,

and see what can be made of it." (This was the accurate account that this young lady chose to give of the object of their coming visit.)

"Dear me, you don't really mean that?" said Lucy, opening her eyes. "What, pull down that big house?"

"That is what papa has got in his head."

"And you mean that Mr. Faulkner is actually thinking of doing it?"

"Oh, I don't say anything as to what Mr. Faulkner may be actually thinking of doing. I don't pretend to know anything about his thoughts. Only we are going there on Tuesday, and Papa is chuckling at the thought of all the alterations he means to suggest."

"It will be rather nice to go to Sutton," said Lucy.

"Yes," answered Anne, "I think it will."

And in fact, when the day came, Miss

Warwick set out on her expedition with quite a holiday feeling.

"What a long time it is since I was at Sutton last! I never have been there since Mrs. Faulkner died, Papa," she said, as the Vicar's stout little pony was bowling them along the road in their modest basket-chaise.

"Haven't you, my dear?" said the Vicar.

"It does seem such a pity to have so little going on there now. If I were Mr. Faulkner, I think I would fill the house with people. Papa, isn't he—a little—cross and unsociable?"

"Not that I ever found out, Anne. He is never cross to me."

"But he never seems to be *very* happy. You never see him in high spirits."

"Well, I suppose a man can't help his spirits. He is happy enough, I think. I never heard him say that he was not."

"But it all seems such a tame sort of thing."

"It is much better to have him tame than wild, I should say."

"Oh, but there are degrees. I always think Mr. Faulkner seems so old."

"Well, old age is a very respectable thing."

"Yes, but old heads on young shoulders are not respectable things—or, at least, they are not desirable things. I don't like them. Look there, Papa—there are the Cholmondeleys coming. Now, bow to them; you are always passing people without bowing."

So the near-sighted Vicar bowed to the Cholmondeleys, and then the current of Anne's thoughts passed into another channel, and they talked no more of Mr. Faulkner and his shortcomings.

The master of Sutton came to the door of his house to receive his guests. He was

a man who was very careless about ceremony, but whose manner had always a quiet natural courtesy, which came perhaps from kindness of nature, or perhaps came only from accident of position and birth ; but at any rate, it gave a certain grace to him. Even Miss Warwick, who was not disposed to overrate him, always allowed that.

He welcomed them, and carried them into his house, and gave them lunch in a fine old library, that was dark with massive black oak bookcases.

“ I remember this room so well,” Anne said, when they went into it. “ Oh, how cool it is !”—for they had come to it out of the hot sunshine. “ What a beautiful room it is !”

She was looking about her with lively interest and pleasure. It was seven years since she had been at Sutton last, and she was only a girl of fourteen then, and her

recollections of the place had not been very accurate.

She began to ask Mr. Faulkner questions as she rambled about the room. How old was all this oak? What, all sixteenth century?—and were these spindle-legged chairs sixteenth century too?—and all the books, were they sixteenth century books? Did he read no books that were more modern than the sixteenth century? The girl was getting saucy; some of their customary light was beginning to sparkle up into her grey eyes.

“Yes—of course I only read sixteenth century books,” he answered gravely. “If you were to look in here any evening, you would find me sitting in a costume of Elizabeth’s time, with a black letter folio on my knees.”

“I should like to come and see you,” she said.



She looked quickly up at him, and then she broke into a little laugh. She had been half afraid for a moment after she had asked him her impertinent question, but his injudicious answer had had a very pernicious effect in taking away her fear. She was a young woman, you see, to whom it was not wise to give even the smallest encouragement to talk nonsense.

"You must look very picturesque—a great deal more picturesque than any of us do now. Do you sit with a pointed hat on, and a velvet cloak, and your rapier trailing on the ground?" she said.

"I daresay you would like to see my dress—would you? I have got it all at hand," he answered; and as she stared he went to a cabinet and opened it, and the next moment threw out a heap of velvet cloaks and laced ruffles and buff jerkins on the floor.

Anne's eyes grew round with surprise as she saw them.

"Why, how have you got these things? You don't ever really wear them, do you? Oh! no, you can't," she cried, and began to laugh. She took up the quaint old garments from the ground. "Did they belong to ancestors of yours? How pretty they are! Tell me about them," she said.

He began to tell her, and they stood talking together; and then Mr. Warwick came up and joined them, and Anne sat on a low chair, with the heap of rich, half-faded fabrics on her lap, and on the floor beside her—now turning them over, and holding them out, and looking at them; now lifting up her bright face to make some remark, or ask some question.

"It is so nice to see old things," she said after a little while. "I suppose you have a great many old things here? Are you

going to show anything else to me?"

"What else would you like to see? There is a good deal of old china in some of the other rooms."

"Well, I should like to see that."

"And my mother had some fine old lace."

"I am very fond of old lace."

"And there are pictures."

"Oh, I remember something about the pictures. They would be better than anything."

"Very well : we will have our lunch, and then you shall see some pictures."

"But you must not forget that we have the verandah to think about too," interposed Mr. Warwick.

"No, no, we won't forget the verandah."

So they had lunch, and then they began to ramble through the house. It was an occupation that made time pass quickly—

an occupation too that Anne enjoyed amazingly, for Mr. Faulkner's pictures, for the greater part, were worth looking at, and some were so lovely that the girl went back again and again to gaze at them. "I don't wonder at your wanting to be an artist," she said to Mr. Faulkner once, "when you have grown up amongst such pictures as these. I think if I lived here I should go wild with longing to paint too."

They wandered through the rooms together for an hour or more. Mr. Warwick soon dropped behind them, attracted by some volume he had found, perhaps, or tired—for he was older than the other two—of the slow progress that they made.

It was four o'clock before they found their way back to him ; and even then Anne came reluctantly.

"Shall we go out into the garden this way?" Mr. Faulkner said. "Look, Mr.

Warwick—my notion was to have the verandah run—as the old one did—along this side of the house.”

They fell to their discussion; and Anne presently left them, and began to go about the grounds by herself. She went out of sight of the house, into the cool shadow of the trees. She was enjoying her holiday; she went wandering on under the great beech branches, singing little snatches of songs to herself.

“Anne, my dear, you are forgetting all about time. We have a good drive home, and it is five o’clock already,” Mr. Warwick said.

She had been rambling amongst the trees for the greater part of an hour, and the two men had come in search of her.

“We shall be home before six, Papa. It doesn’t matter, does it? It is all so lovely here,” the girl said, smiling on them

with her bright face. "Oh, Mr. Faulkner, what grand old trees you have! There is one great beech—do you know the one I mean?—up there, just before you come to that sudden slope."

"Yes—I know."

"Is it not beautiful? I think it is a tree to dream of."

"I wish you could stay a little longer, and I could show you several others quite as fine as that one. It is only five. If you did not need to set off for half an hour——"

"Well, go and look at your trees, and I'll sit down here and wait," said Mr. Warwick resignedly.

So they went away briskly over the grass. It was a bright day, with a fresh sweet breeze. Anne walked on with a quick elastic step, asking questions, making comments. She was happy; she talked

easily to her companion ; she broke into light-hearted laughs that made the grave man at her side smile more than once. She told him plainly, when they returned to rejoin her father, that she was sorry to go away.

“It has been such a pleasant day ; I have enjoyed it all so much. I have liked it so very much,” she said heartily.

“I am glad you have,” he merely answered.

He was very kind to her. Her quick bright ways seemed to amuse him ; there was a frankness about her that he liked perhaps. “You must come again,” he said to her, as he was wishing her good-bye at last.

She turned her face round to smile a farewell to him as they drove away. He was standing in the open door where he had parted from them, a handsome enough

figure of a man, broad-shouldered and tall. But Anne was hardly thinking of his look or carriage as she turned back to give that parting smile to him. She would have thought of it probably if he had been a stranger, but he was only Mr. Faulkner, whom she had known all her life—a sober, middle-aged man (he was only thirty, but at thirty some men do look middle-aged)—her father's friend. It was as a contemporary of her father far more than of herself that Anne always thought of him. If he had come down some day to call at the Parsonage in knee-breeches and gaiters such as her father wore, with a shovel hat like the Vicar's on his head, I do not think that after the first moment the girl would have felt the least surprise.



## CHAPTER IV.

MR. HILTON had gone up to town, and the Summer was passing on.

“My brother was *so* sorry to go away,” Mrs. Osborne said to Lucy Carstairs, calling at the Hall a few days after his departure. “You know it was a matter of necessity—a man must attend to work—but really I had quite a little battle with him about it. He *was* so unwilling to go. But I daresay he told you all that when he came to say good-bye?”

“Oh yes; he—he said he was sorry,” Lucy answered timidly.

“Poor fellow! it is so depressing for him

to go back to those dreary chambers. He does feel it so."

"But he must have a great many friends in London."

"Oh, my dear, not the kind of friends he cares for. Of course he goes into society—but you don't think that that can make him happy? With all the future so far from bright, too——"

"So far from bright? Is it?" said Lucy anxiously.

"Why, my dear Miss Carstairs, what are his prospects? You know he is not a rich man, and it is so hard to get on at the bar."

"But when he is so clever——"

"Oh, cleverness is so common a thing. You have no idea how common it is. Yes, of course he is clever; but I don't think, somehow, that he is strong enough for hard work. And then suppose he should want to marry? Ah, my dear, I assure you it is

very hard for young men who have not private fortunes. Of course they must either marry somebody with money, or else they can't marry at all. Yet if a poor man marries a girl with money, you know what is said at once of him. And I am sure, if I could tell you how false it is in some cases—If you could have heard how poor Fred was talking to me the other night——”

Mrs. Osborne was sitting looking before her into vacancy, quite unconscious, you may be sure, of the hot colour that had come into the other's face. Miss Carstairs had to answer something when her visitor paused ; but she opened her lips twice before any words would come.

“I am sure it must often be very hard,” she managed to say at last.

“My dear Miss Carstairs, I have known lives ruined by it, absolutely ruined. Misunderstandings on both sides—the poor

young man afraid to come forward, the girl assigning wrong reasons for his hesitation—neither of them finding out till too late that all their happiness had depended on one another. Ah, well——” and with a sigh Mrs. Osborne withdrew her eyes from their far, dreamy gaze, and brought them softly to the face of the girl before her—“ah, well, it is no use talking of these things; only sometimes when I come across two young people who might be so happy together, and see that it is nothing but a fear of what ill-natured tongues will say is keeping them apart——Oh, there is a great deal of useless suffering in the world, my dear! It is such a sad, cross world, is it not?” she said.

She had risen from her seat, and had put out her hand. She drew Lucy to her and kissed her, as if by a sudden impulse. “Come and see me soon. You know I am

very lonely now. You will come, won't you?" she said, tenderly.

Did she know what a fluttering heart she left behind her as she turned away? She had made no comment on the burning cheek that she had kissed; but do you think she had not felt its heat upon her lips? "Poor thing, how fond she is of him!" she thought, as she settled herself amongst the cushions of her carriage, "and how happy I have made her!" And she drove home with the cheerful face and the light heart that come from a sense of duty well performed.

And yet perhaps her face would scarcely have been so cloudless or her heart quite so serene if at that moment she had known everything that Anne Warwick or her brother could have told her.

"I have come to say good-bye to you," Mr. Hilton had said to Anne on the after-

noon of the day before he went away. "I am going to town to-morrow, and I don't know when I shall see King's Croft—or you—again."

He had come to make his farewell visit at the Parsonage; but the Vicar was not at home, and he had found Miss Warwick among her flower-beds.

"I daresay you will come back soon. Why should you not come back?" she had asked him.

When she put that question to him he made no answer to it for a moment or two. He was standing by a rose bush, and instead of speaking he began to pull off the roses from it rather nervously, snapping them off by their heads in a very wasteful way.

"Do you think those roses are dead? Why can't you pull off the dead ones—if you want to pull off anything—and leave

the others alone?" said Miss Warwick, staring at him.

"I beg your pardon," he answered, hurriedly. "I was not thinking what I was about." And then, with a sudden courage, or recklessness, or possibly even despair—"You say, why should I not come back soon? Will *you* tell me to come back?" he said.

He turned his face to her as he spoke, but she did not meet his look. I suppose she was startled; her heart very likely might have quickened its beating; but she had a good deal of self-command; she did not betray any surprise; she took a firm hold of her self-possession, and answered him after only a moment's silence.

"I suppose all your friends would tell you to come back," she said. "We don't treat you as if we wanted to break off your acquaintance, do we? I always think it must

be so pleasant for you to spend your time as you do, half here and half in town. Oh! Mr. Hilton, do for mercy's sake leave those flowers alone! Look, now," said the girl, in the most innocent tone in the world, "if you really want to be useful to me, I would ask you to move that wheel-barrow on a little way. You don't mind, do you? I have been gathering all my sticks and rubbish in it, and I was just going to wheel it away into that side-walk. Thank you—you are very good. Look—there is another little heap of leaves to go in. Do you know how gardeners take up leaves? This way, between two bits of board."

"Let me do it for you," said the young man.

He was rather cross, but he could hardly help saying this, and as he said it he took the pieces of board out of her hand. And then he stooped down, and began to gather



up the leaves, growing rather red over the operation.

He could not continue the conversation that he had tried to begin while he was clapping dead leaves together between two boards. Perhaps he did his work with a feeling of soreness in his heart. If he had been wise, he ought to have been grateful to her, and not sore ; but then we are so rarely grateful when we are prevented from doing what we want to do. She talked to him about her flowers, about her strawberries, and her peas and cabbages ; she took him to her cucumber-frame, and gave him a great deal of useful information about the grafting of roses. I am afraid he did not take in much of it all. He walked by her side, but he said very little to her. She glanced at him once or twice, and was quite aware that the handsome face was looking not only sad but sulky, and she was sorry because it

looked sulky. In her heart she wanted to comfort him ; she felt very tenderly to him ; if she dared she would have said to him frankly, " We like each other very much. I am very sorry that you are going away." But of course she could not dare to say this, because she knew that if she had he would have answered her as she did not want him to answer her. So, though she was sorry for him with all her heart, she said nothing to him about her sorrow, but went on talking about roses and cucumbers.

When they had made the circuit of the garden she asked him to come into the house.

" I daresay Papa will be home soon. You would like to see him," she said.

" No, I don't care about seeing him," he answered ungraciously to this. " I had better be going now." And then he stood before her looking on the ground, but he did

not put out his hand, so of course, as he was her guest, she could not offer him hers.

They stood for a few seconds in silence. In spite of her assumption of ease, the effort of the last half-hour had made her nervous, and for the moment she had let go that grip of herself that she had taken, and could not think of anything else to say to him. "Now he will do it after all," she thought, with a sudden terror; and she was right, for before the thought had more than flashed through her he had begun to speak.

"You have not answered that question that I asked you yet," he said, lifting up his eyes abruptly to her face.

She returned his look for a moment; then—"Yes, I answered it," she replied quickly.

She might have pretended not to understand what he meant, but it did not occur to her to do this. She was a girl who, if

she was in play, could be as slippery as an eel, and twist this way and that so dexterously that she could make it a hard matter for you to catch her and pin her down to anything; but when she was in earnest, or when you had got her into a corner, and there was no escape for her, there was a simple directness and honesty about her that made her one of the easiest of women to deal with.

"Yes, I answered it," she replied. "I gave you the only answer that I could."

"But that answer was only an evasion."

"It was a true answer," she said.

She was trying hard to speak without betraying any nervousness; but she *was* nervous, and she showed it.

"We are very good friends, don't say anything—don't let either of us say anything—to spoil our friendship. Yes, I shall be glad when you come back. There is a

plain answer to your question. I say I shall be glad, and I mean that."

"Anne——" he began, hurriedly.

"No, you are not going to say anything more to me," she interrupted him. There was a tone of nervous entreaty in her voice. "Don't say anything more; you will be sorry if you do. Ah! don't—for both our sakes!"

"I don't know why you should try to keep me from speaking. You know very well how I feel to you!" the young man exclaimed passionately. "You know very well that, wherever I go, whatever I do, you are the one thought——"

"Mr. Hilton, here is Papa!" She had put out her hand in her eagerness to silence him. "Hush!—hush! Here is Papa!"

She turned from him, and went forward quickly to meet the Vicar.

"Papa, I was wondering if you would be

home soon. Mr. Hilton has come to say good-bye to us before he goes to town."

"Ah! indeed? I'm glad I haven't missed you—very glad I haven't missed you," said the Vicar, heartily.

He began to talk to his guest. Anne moved a few steps away, and busied herself again—she could invent no other occupation—with her flowers. She only turned back to the two men when, after five minutes, she heard Mr. Hilton wishing her father good day. He had shaken hands with the Vicar before she joined them.

"I must bid you good-bye now," he said to her, in a stiff way, as she came towards him.

He had been watching her with rather a lugubrious look upon his face. As she put out her hand to him, he made one more last reckless effort to do the thing that he was bent on doing. He stood with his

back to the Vicar, and made a request to her in a low voice.

“Will you walk down with me as far as the gate?” he said.

She hesitated for a moment; but, after that moment, she answered :

“No.”

I think she was sorry to answer “No.” I think, if she could have done anything to please him, she would have liked to do it; she cared so much for him that she would almost have liked to promise him the thing he wanted. But she said, “No,” very softly; and then there was nothing else for him to do but to take her hand.

Her refusal had made him angry. He shook hands with her carelessly and loosely, and began to stride down the garden path.

“Stop, Mr. Hilton—stop! Here’s a piece of your property!” the Vicar sudden-

ly called out. "You have dropped one of your gloves."

He picked it up, and presented it to the young man as he turned back.

"Oh, thank you; it's of no consequence,—thank you," said Mr. Hilton, loftily; and, with the recovered glove in his hand, he recommenced his retreat.

"Do you ever wear flowers in your button-hole? Is not this a lovely rose? Will you have it?" Anne suddenly said.

She half ran after him with a damask rose-bud in her hand. He stopped, and they stood face to face again for another moment. The girl's cheeks were hot; there was a deprecating look in her eyes.

"Don't be angry with me—I can't help it," she said hurriedly, under her breath.

He had taken the rose from her—without thanking her for it, indeed; but still he had taken it. When she spoke to him he looked



at her reproachfully, but he made no answer to her. With a sudden impulse she put out her hand to him a second time, and he took it without speaking; and then he went once more on his way, and she went back and joined her father.

“That young man seems in a hoity-toity mood to-day,” said the Vicar. “What did he mean by saying it was of no consequence whether or not he lost his glove? Of no consequence! A most absurd speech!”

And, with a laugh, the Vicar went indoors to his study, and Anne ran up to her own room and locked the door.

“I like him very much—oh! I know I like him very much. I wonder if I have done wrong!” she thought.

She was trembling and agitated; she sat down and began to cry. She knew that she liked him; she thought that possibly he

might even make her love him—possibly, in time, if he were true to her. But then he was not true; was not that what she had always known—what she knew still, even at this moment, as well as ever? “No, he is not true—he never is true with all his heart. If I had let him speak just now he would have repented to-morrow that he had spoken. Oh, yes, I am a fool to be sorry for him. He will bear his disappointment very well. He may be congratulating himself upon it already. I daresay he is. I daresay, before he gets back to Mrs. Osborne’s just now, he will be saying to himself that it was a good thing Papa came at that moment and stopped him.”

And then the girl put her hands over her face, and cried for a moment or two with rather a passionate feeling of humiliation; but after she had cried for a little, some

other thought came and made her dry her tears.

“ Well, he will go to Lucy, and she will console him,” she said to herself. “ In a year’s time I daresay Lucy will be his wife. But *I* might have had him instead of her, if I had liked.”

And I am afraid that when this reflection occurred to her, Miss Warwick was more calmed and comforted by it than a thoroughly admirable woman should have been.

## CHAPTER V.

FOR the most part life passed in a sleepy way at King's Croft. The Vicar made rambling visitations about his parish; Anne tended her house, and taught little boys and girls their catechism; up at the Hall day followed day with the regularity and the monotony of clockwork. "I wish something would happen!" Lucy Carstairs would sometimes say wearily to her cousin; but Anne, on her side, never spoke about wishing that things would happen, or felt the days long, or the quietness of her life hard to bear. The girl was so healthy, and so full of energy and cheerfulness, that

she found interest in everything about her—in the common homely details of her daily life; in the copying of her father's sermons; in the rearing of her flowers; in the talk of the old men and women with whom she used to sit; in the children whom she taught and played with; even in the village gossip which she would gather and pour out again (with additions and embroideries sometimes, I am afraid, that were quite unwarranted by sober truth) into her cousin's or her father's ears.

She had a jesting, illuminated way of telling things that took in, and was intended to take in, nobody, but that the Vicar used to laugh at sometimes till the tears were on his cheeks. "You must get Anne to tell you that—that is one of Anne's stories," he would often say, and would set the girl to tell it, leaning back in his arm-chair, and listening to her with his mouth wide with

laughter. For she had a gift for story-telling, and perhaps for talking generally, and she used to keep her life cheerful by exercising it.

"Dull? No, I am never dull," she said to Mrs. Osborne once. "I always find more things to do than I can manage to get done,"—a speech upon which Mrs. Osborne commented inwardly with some bitterness. For Anne Warwick, you see, was rather a thorn in Mrs. Osborne's side, and some of the things she did were things that Mrs. Osborne would gladly see her leave unaccomplished. It was not Anne's fault, perhaps. I think she was a girl who could not help making enemies, and possibly too she was rather indifferent about making them—too contented with the admiration that many gave her to care about the ill-will of a few.

At any rate—be that as it may—at this

time of her life she was very happy. She had no grave trouble of any kind in the world—she was handsome and young and clever. She used to think afterwards, when real trouble came, that no lighter-hearted girl could ever have lived than she was until she was nearly two-and-twenty. Probably she became a better woman after she knew what it was to be sad as well as to rejoice, and had learnt the weariness of rising day after day to a life that had no sunshine in it; but yet as she was in these early years there was a charm about her of which she possibly lost something afterwards—a charm like the wild fresh brightness of a breezy day.

How careless she was of the happiness of that time while it lasted! How little she ever seemed to think of change, as if she did not know what fear was! “The Summer is going. Well, yes, it is going, but other Summers will come after this one.

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Why are you so fond of moaning over the past?" she asked Lucy Carstairs one day. "The past is good, but the present is good too, and the future may be better than either. Why don't you look forward instead of back?—to to-morrow's sunrise instead of yesterday's sunset? You are always so fond of melancholy things, Lucy—of clouds and Autumn, and dead leaves and decay. *I* don't like decay, for my part: I don't like Autumn, with its smell of graveyards. I like Spring and youth and hope and bright skies."

She was standing on the terrace at the Hall—standing in that way she liked, in a broad blaze of sunshine, with the light striking full into her clear grey eyes. She was wearing a white gown, and had got a white rose fastened in her hair. She was one of the women who always look well in white.



Mr. Faulkner, coming presently up the hill with the Vicar, while she was still standing so, made that remark about her.

"Yes, you're right—you're right," said Mr. Warwick. "I always like her in white myself. She is a—a rather graceful figure, you see—"

"I don't know if she owes it to her grace, or what it is, but that sort of gown suits her," the other answered quietly.

He began to say something next moment about the red light glowing on the trees, and then the girls—for Lucy was there too—came forward to join them.

What is there in some special days which makes them stand out from others that have gone before and that come after them? It was only a warm September afternoon, with here and there a touch of red amongst the leaves, with a pure blue sky, and white clouds driven by the west wind. Such days

come often, yet more than one of them remembered this one when it was gone.

I suppose it was Anne's peculiar brightness that made it leave a mark on the others' memory. The girl was in one of her gayest moods ; she would not talk to anyone gravely ; she played even with Mr. Faulkner, and made him laugh ; she sat down once and began to sing to them. It was on the terrace that she sat, while they listened round her. She had been gathering flowers for Lucy, and then she sat down with her basket of roses and geraniums on her lap, and suddenly began to sing an old rambling ballad—one of those quaint old love-stories that are at the same time so laughable and so pathetic, so sweet and so impossible. Mr. Faulkner and the Vicar had been talking together, but they stopped their talking as Anne began to sing, and came towards her, and stood listening.

"Now give us another," some one said, when the first ballad had ended; and so she sang another, and then a third. She made a bright picture as she sat singing, with her beautiful face turned to her hearers, and the rich-coloured flowers glowing in the sunshine on her knees.

"Well, girls, this is all very pleasant, but I think I, for one, must be going home," the Vicar said at last.

"But you are not going to take Anne?" Miss Carstairs pleaded.

And then it was settled that Anne should stay behind. But the two girls walked down the avenue with their visitors to the gate, and Anne, as they walked, still went on talking in her light happy way,—still flinging out those careless sparkling words of hers. There was more than one of her companions who remembered it all afterwards—the clear laughing voice, the bright untroubled

face, the melody, and the beauty, and the happy grace of every movement.

It was only a week after this day that the Vicar one evening rubbed his eyes, and laid down the book that he was reading on his knee.

"I feel very stupid to-night," he said to Anne. "I have taken cold, I fancy. I almost think, my dear, I'll go to bed."

Mr. Warwick was not a very strong man, and was ailing sometimes; so Anne petted him a little (he liked petting, and got a good deal of it), and then the father and daughter said good night to one another. It was not very early in the evening: it was nearly ten o'clock. An hour later, when Anne went up to bed, she looked in at her father's room, and found him asleep. But in the morning, when she rose and visited him again, he looked at her with very heavy eyes.

"No, I haven't had a good night, dear—I haven't had an easy night," he said ; "and—and—don't bend over me, my darling. When people are not well, you know, it is better not. I don't feel able to get up. I think, Anne, after breakfast—no, stand a little further back, dear—I think, after breakfast, you might just as well send up a note to Dr. Russell."

"Yes, dear," Anne answered quickly, not for the moment showing her alarm ; but the fear that her words did not express had come into the girl's eyes. There were some cases of scarlatina in the village, and the Vicar for several days past had been visiting in one of the cottages where a girl was lying ill with it. It had often happened to him to do a thing of the same sort before, and no harm had followed ; but the pitcher that goes ninety-nine times in safety to the well gets broken at the hundredth visit.

"Yes, I suspect it is scarlatina. I shall be able to speak positively in a few more hours, but I am afraid there is not much doubt of it," Dr. Russell said gravely, when he saw Mr. Warwick.

He came in the morning, and he came again in the afternoon, and at his second visit he said to Anne—"You will need a nurse. You had better get a nurse, my dear, and keep as much as you can out of his room."

"Then you are sure now?" she said quickly, with a quiver in her voice.

Perhaps during the weary hours of suspense she had little doubt of the decision that the doctor's second visit would bring, but at least during these hours there had been still one shadow of hope.

"Will you be able to send a nurse to me?" she asked Dr. Russell. "Of course I shall not keep away from him—I had

scarlatina when I was a child—I am not afraid for myself; but I shall be thankful to have some one to help me that I can trust.”

She went back to her father’s room after a little while, and sat down by his bedside, and laid her hand on his. She only asked him some slight question—if he was thirsty, or if his throat pained him much,—and then she sat down, and neither of them spoke any more, till after five minutes had passed he began softly to stroke her fingers with his hot hand, and then, when she was about to say something, he interposed very quietly. .

“I shan’t get over this,” he said. “No, my darling,”—for the girl had broken into an uncontrollable sob—“you must not break down about it. You know death must come sooner or later. Just sit still beside me, and let us talk together quietly for a little while.”

"But not as you want to talk—no—no—not in that tone!" she pleaded.

He went on patting her hand for a few moments without replying.

"My dear, I don't want to die," he said at last. "I have had a very happy life. I should have liked to be with you for a few years longer. But I understand something of my own constitution, dear: I'm not a bad doctor, you know. Of course one makes mistakes—perhaps I may be making a mistake now—only I think not. There—I should not hold your hand—you ought not to be with me at all, I am afraid, my dearest—only—it would be hard to me not to see you. But sit back a little—yes, that way. I want us just to talk together for a little while, because my head may not be clear to-morrow, you know," the Vicar said simply and pathetically.

And then he began to talk to her about



the things that were most in his mind.

He had been a poor man all his life. "My great trouble is," he said, "that I shall leave so little to you. There is nothing but the life insurance, and you know how small that is. I often meant to increase it, but there has always been so much use for every pound. I wish to God now that I had done it, in spite of the difficulty."

"You must not trouble yourself about it, dear. You must not think about it," she said softly.

"I can't help thinking about it, Anne ; it lies like a great weight upon me. I know you will have friends. There is your uncle Carstairs—he won't let you want—but somehow your uncle does not do things graciously, you know. Even when he means to be kind he has a grudging way that makes it hard to receive favours from him. Ah, my dear, I wish you had some-

thing more of your own! I wish I had provided better for you!"

She tried to soothe him. She told him that he must not think about her—that she was not afraid—that when he got better they would make the insurance larger. The poor Vicar shook his head when she said that. "My darling, it is too late. I shall never make it larger now," he said.

There is little enough reason in many presentiments, but Mr. Warwick probably had some good ground for the belief he held that his illness would prove fatal to him. He had studied medicine in his youth, and knew, perhaps, that he was a bad subject for such a fever.

"He is very ill—I can tell you nothing more than that—but he is very ill," Anne said, in a trembling voice, to Mr. Faulkner, on the second day.

Mr. Faulkner had come up to the Par-

sonage to inquire for his friend—like half the rest of the parish, for the news of the Vicar's illness had spread, of course, in a few hours, far and wide,—and seeing Anne in the garden, whither she had been sent by Dr. Russell, he had gone to her, and joined her. They had walked for a little while up and down the garden paths. She had as yet seen no one since her father's illness had begun. Few, indeed, of those who called at the house would have cared to enter it, or to hold any communication with her ; she would not have come face to face with Mr. Faulkner now, if she had had any choice in the matter. But he came and joined her, so she could not avoid him, nor leave him, when he chose to walk beside her.

“Do you remember how well he was only two days ago?” she said, wistfully.  
“I go about feeling as if I was in a dream.

It is not forty-eight hours yet since he was sitting with me, talking of things that he wanted to do next week—of some work that we were to do together,—and now there is his empty study—there is his empty chair—— Oh, I don't know how to look at it, and think that he may never sit there again !”

She burst into tears, and he let her cry without trying to check her. He could not comfort her by giving her hope, but his silent sympathy, perhaps, though she did not know it, did something to console her. She said to the nurse, when she went back into the house, that the air had done her good; but it was something more, possibly, than the fresh air that had helped, for the moment, to make the weight at her heart a little lighter.

She was not walking in her garden the next morning, when Mr. Faulkner called

again ; but a servant came up to her with a message from him. He had sent to ask if she would come and speak to him for a minute.

“ Oh, no—I can’t,” she answered quickly, when this message was delivered.

She spoke almost impatiently. Why did he trouble her when other people let her alone ? But the next moment she checked her impatience. The maid was still waiting for her reply.

“ Well, say I will come, Sarah—but you should not have let him in,” she said.

She went downstairs unwillingly : she did not greet him very graciously.

“ Sarah should not have brought you into the house. You know nobody comes in,” she said to him.

“ It was my fault—not Sarah’s,” he replied. “ You must forgive me for it—and for bringing you downstairs as well. I

would not have disturbed you, only I wanted very much to ask you a question. Do you think " — he hesitated a little — he seemed almost embarrassed — "do you think it would be possible for me to see your father?"

"To see him?" she repeated, and looked up, amazed, into his face. "What would be the good? He could not talk to you."

"Is the fever so high, then?"

"He has been delirious all night." Her lips quivered as she spoke. "He often does not even know me. Oh, no; it would be out of the question for anyone to see him."

"I am very sorry," he said gravely.

"Did you want to say anything specially to him?" she asked, after a moment or two's silence. "You know, if you liked to leave any message for him, I would give it

to him, if I could ; or even, if you would write a note——”

He shook his head.

“No ; I must leave it alone,” he said.

“If he gets better——”

“Ah, if he gets better—!” She echoed his words passionately, and then turned away. She went and stood for a few minutes at the open window.

“He has been lying more quiet for this last hour or two ; but all night—oh, it was such a dreadful night !” she said, presently.

“I never was with anyone who was delirious before, and to see *him* so—! I think if he does not get over it (and, oh, he will not get over it!) I think last night will haunt me afterwards as long as I live.”

“It will only haunt you if you try to dwell on it ; but you won’t do that,” he answered quietly. “If he should not recover you will have all the happy years that

you have spent together to remember, and not the sadness of these few hours."

And then he talked to her about those days that were perhaps ended now, and about her father's upright, honourable, manly life, till tender tears—tears that had no bitterness in them—began to wet the girl's cheeks.

"I think you are very kind to me," she said gratefully, lifting her face up to his, when after a quarter of an hour he bade her good-bye. "I was very wretched when you came, and you have done me good."

As he shook hands with her he said nothing about seeing her again. She saw no one else, and so there seemed no special reason why she should see him; and yet as they parted she probably thought that he would return, and if he had asked her if he *should* return I think she would have answered Yes; for we turn back instinctive-



ly for sympathy to the quarter from which we have gained it once, and from the nature of her father's illness Anne was at this time cut off from the society, and from whatever comfort that society would have given her, of all the friends who would most naturally, under other circumstances, have come to help and console her. "Are you not afraid to come into the house? I don't think you ought to come in," she had said this morning to Mr. Faulkner; but he had hardly answered her question.

She used to wonder, in remembering it all afterwards, how quietly from this day Mr. Faulkner's visits seemed to become tacitly accepted events—not things to which she looked forward, or about which she thought or in any keen way cared, yet which, when they came, daily, and even twice a day, she after this time received without either question or surprise. He always asked

to see her when he came, and she always went down and saw him. She talked to him as she did to no one else ; she let the tears come in his presence that she did not shed when she was in the sick-room ; when hope was gone, and she knew of a certainty that her father was dying, his face was the first friend's face that she saw.

It was on the sixth day of his illness that Dr. Russell told her the end was not far off. The fever had been very rapid and very high ; now it had sunk, but the patient had not strength to rally.

"He won't live above four and twenty hours more," the doctor said to Mr. Faulkner. The two men had met at the garden-gate, the one going up to the house, the other leaving it. "Ah, yes, it's a sad case. A man quite in the prime of life. But we can't reason about these things. Can you see him, do you say ? Well, if you particu-

larly want to see him— I wouldn't advise it, you know, because of course it is a risk to yourself; but as far as *he* is concerned there need be no objection. He is quite himself again now, poor fellow—knows he is dying, and all that. If you see him at all I should say it would need to be to-night; but you had better speak to Miss Warwick."

And then Mr. Faulkner went on to the house. But for a little while he could not make his request to Anne. As she came downstairs to meet him, and he took her hand with some murmured word of pity, she burst into an uncontrollable passion of grief. He could not make his request to her till that was passed and she had grown calmer. When he made it at last, she said, almost without hesitation,

"Yes, you can see him if you like. I think he would be glad to say good-bye to you." And then, after a moment—"I was

talking to him about you only a little while ago. I was telling him how kind you had been. Should you like me to go upstairs now, and ask him if he will see you?"

She went up, and a few minutes later Mr. Faulkner followed her to the sick-room.

"I want you to leave me with him for a few moments," he said to Anne.

"Very well," she merely answered. If she felt any surprise she expressed none. She took him into the room, and then left him.

When he came downstairs again at the end of half an hour, he found her waiting below for him. She looked an inquiry into his face, but he did not answer it.

She walked down with him to the garden-gate. After a little while she asked him if her father had been able to talk to him.

"Yes, more able than I thought he would be," he answered. After a few moments

more he said—"It is all so peaceful and beautiful. He has made me feel as if we could hardly wish to keep him."

"Ah, *you* say that!" she cried piteously; and then they neither of them spoke again, till at the gate he bade her a grave good-bye.

She went back into her father's room when he was gone. The Vicar was lying with calm, open eyes, and quiet lips, that broke into something like a smile as Anne came in. He stretched his hand out to her.

"My darling!" he said, and she came and sat down beside him.

"Has he gone?" he asked, in a feeble voice.

"Mr. Faulkner? Yes," she said.

"I am so glad you brought him in. It has been a great comfort to me—a great comfort," the Vicar said.

She looked at him with perhaps some

momentary feeling of surprise, for the expression seemed a strong one to use; but yet her heart was too full of other things for that thought to do more than cross it. There was a little silence, and then Mr. Warwick began to speak again.

“He is a good man, Anne.”

“Yes, I think he is,” she said.

“A thoroughly good, honourable man. If any opinion of mine should weigh with you after I am gone, you will remember that I thought that—will you not?”

“Oh, yes,” she answered, soothingly. She began to stroke his hair. “Won’t you lie still a little now, dear, and try to sleep?” she asked him.

“Presently, my dear,” he said—“presently.” And then, after a few moments—  
“You will go to him, if you want anything,” he went on, in the same earnest way.  
“Remember, I ask you to do that. Let

him help and advise you. He is the best person to do it. Of course your uncle will take the general management of things,—I know that; but if you are in any difficulty, go to Mr. Faulkner. Do you understand, Anne?"

"Yes, dear—yes," she said.

"I mean—you may trust him; he is a good friend. You may trust him in every way. You won't forget, my darling?"

"No," she said, "surely not."

"Well, that is all, I think. That is all I wanted to say to you. God bless you both! It has been a great comfort to me—a great, great relief."

He murmured another word or two, but she could not hear them; and then they both became silent, and presently his eyes began to close. He gradually fell asleep, and dozed through the evening. He scarcely spoke connectedly to her again. Sometimes

when he half woke up, and she put a few drops of wine into his mouth, he looked at her with a faint smile ; he called her once, and moved his hand as if in search of hers.

They sat watching him in the quiet room all through the night. "Poor dear, he's slipping away like a lamb," the nurse said, when the dawn came. Just after the sun rose he opened his eyes for a moment ; then closed them again, with a tired sigh, and died.



## CHAPTER VI.

“WELL, of course she must come here —she has nowhere else to go to. It makes no difference to me,” said Mr. Carstairs, “but I must say I never knew a more short-sighted thing than for a man to insure his life for such a sum. Five hundred pounds! God bless me, what a piece of folly! Why, if she hadn’t this house to come to she’d be a beggar!”

Mr. Carstairs made this speech in answer to something that his daughter had said to him on the morning of the Vicar’s death.

“I should like so much to ask Anne to come at once to us, if you don’t mind,

Papa," Lucy had said. "You see, as we are her nearest relations, naturally everyone will expect——"

"I don't care a brass farthing for what everyone expects," Mr. Carstairs had interrupted, sharply. "But of course she can come here if she pleases." And then he had added the rest that I have written above.

So Lucy wrote to Anne, and Anne, though she would not agree to come to the Hall at once, promised that she would come presently—"after his funeral," she said, in the sad little note in which she replied to her cousin's invitation. Till then she stayed alone at the Parsonage, and in the arrangements that had to be made during the days that passed before the Vicar's burial it was Mr. Faulkner who made himself the medium of communication between her and the Hall.

"You're not afraid of infection, it seems?"

Mr. Carstairs said to him the first day. "Well, I'm not a timid man either; but I don't see the use of trying to catch a fever if there's no necessity for it; so if you are going to the house at any rate, I shall be obliged if you will tell Anne—"

And then he proceeded to deliver his message, and in this manner what he wanted to say was transmitted to his niece's ears.

"You are doing everything. I don't know how to thank you," Anne said more than once to Mr. Faulkner.

She had told him some of those last words that her father had spoken to her. When her heart was full at their first meeting after his death, she had thanked and blessed him for the kindness—whatever that kindness might have been—that had comforted the Vicar's last conscious moments. "Your visit was the last pleasure that he had in the world. God bless you for giving it to

him," she had said. She had felt at that moment as if she could not be grateful enough to him.

Since then, however, she had grown calmer, and had taken his continued kindness quietly and passively enough, receiving it almost in a self-absorbed way that caused her hardly either to question the reason of it or to feel surprised at it. He was very kind; her father was right, she only thought—he was *very* good and kind. So she let him come and talk to her, and think for her, and even act for her day after day; and it was only long afterwards that she reproached herself for having done it all, and saw how her selfish grief—then and for months to come—had made her blind.

It was the middle of October when the Vicar died, and the weather was still bright and the country was still beautiful when on the day after his funeral Anne left the house

that had been her home for two-and-twenty happy years.

“I feel as if I had nothing more to do,” she said to Lucy when she sat down in the drawing-room at the Hall that first evening. Nothing more to do,—no one any more whose life wanted hers to round it,—no one to work for any more! Full of energy as she naturally was, for the first few weeks after she went to her cousin her energy seemed to be all gone; she could rouse herself to care for almost nothing. The sudden blow had half stunned her. Almost her only pleasure seemed to be in the soothing sight of nature—in spending long dreamy hours thinking of the past. “I am very idle. I am afraid you are ashamed of me for being so idle,” she said deprecatingly to Mr. Faulkner once.

Mr. Carstairs was not a man of warm

affections, but he had a kind of lukewarm liking for his niece.

"I'm sorry your father was able to leave you so little, Anne," he said to the girl a day or two after she came to his house. "I don't know what he could have been thinking of, for my part, but—well, of course we can't help that now. What I want to say is, I am very glad to see you here, and as long as you like to stay, why, you're welcome."

"Thank you, uncle," she answered, with a little colour in her face.

And then she forced herself to say a word or two more.

"I shall be glad to be here, if you will have me, for the present," she said.

"Well, present or future, as you like—it makes no difference to me. There's your room, and you can keep it."

And then Mr. Carstairs went his way,

and never doubted probably but that he had asked his niece to take up her abode with him with all due courtesy and kindness.

But Anne for her part had no intention of taking up her permanent abode at the Hall—she would not have done it though Mr. Carstairs had given his invitation with ten times the warmth he did.

“I am not going to talk about plans yet,” she said to Lucy the day after she came. “I can’t tell you yet what I am going to do. I am too weary and too sick at present to think about it.”

So Lucy asked no questions, and the weeks passed on. She had a suspicion that Anne did not mean to stay with her very long, and this suspicion troubled her, because she wanted her to stay, but she was afraid to provoke a discussion that might bring on the very event she longed to oppose and

delay. So she held her tongue, and Anne held hers, and the golden Autumn passed gradually into Winter.

A new clergyman had come, and brought his wife and children to the Parsonage, and Mr. Warwick's household goods had been sold and scattered. The old familiar life was gone—all vestige of it swept away. "Yes, changes come very quickly," Anne said, in answer to some murmured speech of sympathy that Mr. Hilton made to her one December afternoon.

She and Frederick Hilton had never met since that day when, in the Parsonage garden, he had tried to ask her to be his wife. He had not been to King's Croft since then. Now he had come to spend Christmas with the Osbornes, and he had walked up to the Hall this Winter afternoon.

He had been thinking a great deal of Anne as he took his walk: he was very



keenly and honestly moved when he saw her. He found the two girls sitting together in the room into which he was ushered.

“Oh, Mr. Hilton!” Lucy exclaimed when she saw him; and she rose up quickly, with the colour coming to her face.

But the colour did not come to Anne’s face, and she gave him her hand as he came to her with a very quiet smile of welcome. It was he, and not she, who was affected by their meeting. The girl looked so beautiful in her deep mourning, with a stateliness, and yet at the same time a graciousness, that seemed almost new to him. If she had lost a little of her brilliancy, had she not gained something in its place that was sweeter even than that brilliancy had been?

He did not say anything to her at first

about his sympathy; but presently, when Miss Carstairs happened to leave the room for a moment or two, he tried to utter a few words.

“How little I thought, when I saw you last—I was never more shocked in my life—I have been thinking so often of you,” he murmured, half inaudibly.

“Yes, changes come very quickly sometimes,” she answered then. Perhaps she also for a few seconds was a little moved. She liked the man, you know, and she had not been able yet to forget their last meeting. Her lip quivered for a moment. “It sometimes seems already as if it was all a long time ago,” she said.

She began the next minute to talk of something else. It was sharp frosty weather.

“I suppose you have brought your skates with you? You know everybody is skating

this Winter on the pond in the forty acres meadow," she said. "Lucy and I walked down to look at them yesterday. If you will go and skate, we will come and look at you too."

"I will go and skate this moment, if you will do that," he said.

"But you can't go and skate this moment, when you have got nothing with you to skate in. Why do you make such rash assertions? If you like to say you will go to-morrow——"

"Very well—I will go to-morrow."

"Then we will come to-morrow and see you—won't we, Lucy? We are fond of seeing good skating."

"But I did not say that I was a good skater."

"No, you did not say it, but I suppose you are, or you would not be so ready to let us come and look at you. No man ever

cares to have anyone see him do a thing that he thinks he does not do well."

And then Mr. Hilton laughed. She could take him up still in her old way, he saw.

"I don't suppose she is very broken-hearted," he said to his sister, when he returned from his call.

"Broken-hearted!—no, why should she be broken-hearted?" replied Mrs. Osborne. "Her father's death was very sudden and shocking, of course; but dear me, people must die. Oh no, I don't suppose she is broken-hearted at all. If all is true that is said, she is quite the reverse of that."

"What do you mean? *What* is said?" asked Mr. Hilton sharply.

"Oh, I don't want you to quote me as an authority, Fred. I know nothing but what I am told. All I mean is this that everybody says she is setting her cap at Mr. Faulkner."

“Faulkner, of Sutton?” Mr. Hilton’s eyes gave a flash. “Perfect nonsense!” he exclaimed indignantly.

“Now what an absurd thing that is to say! How can you possibly tell that it is nonsense? Why in the world should it be nonsense? The girl *must* marry; she has hardly got a penny, you know, and if she can get a rich man to fall in love with her, I am sure she will be a great goose not to have him. But for mercy’s sake don’t look so savage, Fred. It is not I who am trying to marry her to Mr. Faulkner. She is managing that business for herself, I can tell you; and, if one is to believe all one hears, she is doing it pretty cleverly too.”

“I don’t believe a word of it,” cried Mr. Hilton.

“My dear Fred, I don’t think it is of the least consequence whether you believe it or not. It won’t alter the matter one way or

the other. And as for its being any concern of yours—well, I think you know pretty clearly that *you* can't marry her, whether Mr. Faulkner does or not."

And then Mr. Hilton merely muttered something fiercely into his beard, and turned impatiently away.

He had said that he did not believe his sister's story, but of course in reality he did believe it, and his heart already was on fire with jealousy. It might be quite true that he could not marry her himself, but did that make it less bitter that another man should have her? She came up to meet him next day amongst the skaters with some laughing words, and he received her address with a surliness that made her open her eyes.

"Young Hilton seems to be in an odd temper, doesn't he?" said Mr. Faulkner, who was beside her at the moment, when he had turned his back again. "I used

to think him rather a pleasant fellow."

"Yes, he can be very pleasant; but I suppose his temper is not a strong point in him," she answered quietly. "Perhaps his boots pinch him, or his skates don't fit."

Did she think anything else that she did not speak? If she did you could not have told it. She was standing by Mr. Faulkner's side, making remarks upon the skaters, and seeming to be taking the most moderate interest either in them or in her companion.

She began presently to watch Mr. Hilton; and after a time, when he came off the ice, she went to him and spoke to him again. She made him some half jesting compliment, and he received it ungraciously enough.

"You can't skate well upon such a piece of water as this. I think I will ride over to Darlingford to-morrow," he said.

"But you will have none of us to look at you there," she answered.

"That doesn't matter," he replied loftily.

"Oh, I thought it did."

"If you go for the exercise, the fewer spectators you have the better."

"Oh!"

"Of course, if you only care for skating as a piece of fashionable amusement——"

"You are too severe for me to-day. I wish you would get upon the ice again."

"I am not going on any more."

"What! not going on any more, when Lucy and I have come on purpose to look at you?"

"There are plenty of other people to look at."

"Yes, but we have seen them all before."

And then, with a little more coaxing, Mr. Hilton allowed himself to be persuaded to go upon the ice again.

But it was not a happy day with him. The two girls had a mile to go home, and



when they were prepared to start, Mr. Hilton took off his skates, and went with them ; but Mr. Faulkner went with them too, and it was with Anne that he walked. They divided naturally into pairs, and Mr. Faulkner went, almost as if it was a matter of course, to Miss Warwick's side. He had not been skating that day—perhaps if he had, Mr. Hilton would have been comforted, for he did not skate with any special excellence, and a comparison of their two figures on the ice would probably have been to Mr. Hilton's advantage ; but he had not skated, and for a couple of hours he had walked about the meadow, either with Miss Warwick or close to her. So poor Frederick Hilton's heart was hot and sore within him when, as they walked back, he saw the other set himself at Miss Warwick's side, with a calm assurance that seemed to add insult to injury.

Anne fell rather into a fit of silence as they took that walk back to the Hall together. She was very much at home by this time with Mr. Faulkner, and had ceased for a good while to feel that she was always under the necessity of talking to him. She used to say frankly to Lucy, "He is so soothing and comfortable to be with. It might be rather dull and unexciting to spend very much time with him, but when you are stupid and don't want to exert yourself, I would rather have him with me than almost anyone." So she had got to be very friendly with him.

"Are you tired?" he asked her to-day, after they had walked on a little way.

"Oh, no," she answered. "I am not tired—I was only thinking. I have a plan in my mind. I think you must come and talk to me about it," she said suddenly.

"Can't you tell it to me now?"

"There would hardly be time—would there? Oh, well, perhaps there would. I can tell you if you like. It is only this:—We had a call yesterday from Mrs. Frazer, and she told us that her sister in Devonshire, Mrs. Willoughby, is looking out for a governess for her two little girls. Now, they are nice little girls—I know them, and I know their mother, and she is nice too; and I have been wondering if *I* would do for them."

"If you would do to be their governess?"

"Yes. They would not want me for a month or two, so I should have a little longer time here. I have been thinking of it all day, and it seems to me just as good a chance as is likely to come to me."

"But are you quite resolved to leave your uncle's?"

"Oh, yes."

"They will be very much opposed to your going."

"Yes, I know; but I could not go on living here."

"I should be very much against your doing anything in a hurry."

"But, you see, I am not doing anything in a hurry. I have waited all this time."

"I wish you would wait a little longer."

"But I should like to go to these people; and if I really think seriously of it I must write to Mrs. Willoughby quickly."

"Don't write at any rate till I have seen you again. I would come up to-morrow, or on Thursday, and we might talk about it more deliberately."

"Very well. Come if you can on Thursday. That is Lucy's day at the school."

"You have not said anything to your cousin, then?"

"No, I am afraid,"—with a laugh. "I have told no one. You see, it is only you that I bother with my business. You are always

so calm and reasonable. That is ..... makes it such a comfort to talk things over with you."

"I don't know that I am always calm and reasonable."

"Well, you are when *I* have to do with you. And that is all that I need concern myself about, you know," she said, and looked up to his face with a frank laugh.

How often in great crises of one's life one takes note of little unimportant things—a dress that some one wore—a perfume in the air—perhaps it may be only a certain chair set in some remembered place. There were some hyacinths in flower standing on the drawing-room mantelpiece at the Hall on that Thursday afternoon when Mr. Faulkner came to talk to Anne, and for years afterwards the scent of hyacinths recalled that day, and brought back a memory from which time hardly took the sting.

She was wholly innocent of all suspicion of what he was going to say to her when he entered the room, and she rose to meet him in her ordinary friendly way.

"I think it is so good of you to come; you are always doing such kind things," she said to him. "You almost make me feel as if I were imposing on you."

"Well, I hope, at any rate, I make you feel, too, that I like to be imposed on," he answered, with a laugh.

"It is only a bit more of your goodness to say that."

"Is it?" he replied.

He went up to the fire, and held his hands over the blaze. He was hardly in a humour for bandying little light, laughing speeches with her. It seemed almost like mockery to him to hear her thanking him for being kind.

They talked for a few moments of ordi-

nary things, and then she said, "I have been thinking a good deal of what I was speaking to you about, and it seems to me that I could not do anything better. I hope you are not going to tell me that you think me wrong."

"No, I don't think you wrong," he answered—"that is, looking at the matter from your point of view."

"But I *must* look at it from my point of view."

"Not exclusively."

"I think I must."

"Do you not owe something to other people?"

"To my uncle, do you mean?"

"Well, to your uncle."

"I don't think I owe very much to him. And, besides, he is not likely to interfere. You are wrong if you think he has much of the kind of pride that would be disturbed

by the thought that he had a niece who was a governess. No, I am troubled a little about Lucy, but not about him at all."

"Then let your cousin be a check upon you."

"To make me give up the thought of ever going away, do you mean? Oh, no, I could not do that."

"I was not speaking of you ever going away. But why go just yet?"

"Do you not see how idle I am? Do you not see that I want something to do? Of course you will tell me that I can find plenty of work here, if I choose to take it; but don't you understand that the atmosphere in this house is not an atmosphere for anybody to work in? I am poor, and I don't want to live in this luxurious way. I am not fond of my uncle, and I don't want to be dependent on him. I *ought* to go away. I never have had a moment's doubt



about that since papa died, and I feel it more strongly every day."

"I never said that you ought not to go away ; but there may be different ways of going."

He was standing by the mantel-piece, looking into the fire, not looking at her.

"If you will not give up this scheme for your cousin's sake, will you give it up for mine?" he said abruptly.

"For—*yours*?"

"You say that you do not want to be dependent on your uncle, but you need not be dependent on him. Will you give it up—and be my wife?"

She looked for an incredulous moment into his face; then the blood rushed in a volume to her cheek.

"Oh! how can you ask me such a thing?" she said.

He could not tell whether her tone meant

to indicate surprise, or pain, or anger ; the words burst from her like a cry—and that was all.

“Did you not know that I was going to ask it? Surely you must have known that I meant to say it sooner or later?”

“No, no—I never knew.”

“Then, if that is so, you cannot give me an answer now. I do not want you to give me an answer.”

“But, Mr. Faulkner, it is out of the question. I don’t need to think about it. Oh ! you are very good, but—but—it *could* not be.”

“Will you let me speak a few words to you?”

He said this after a pause. He had stood quite still since the moment when he had put his first question to her. *She* had started forward in her seat, but no movement had come from him ; only the veins

were standing out a little in his forehead when he began to address her again.

"I have been driven to speak to you suddenly," he said, "in a way I had not meant to do—for, though I have loved you for a long time, I have never deceived myself into thinking that you had more than a very slight regard for me. But I have ventured to hope that, in time, I might make you like me better. Anne, will you do so much as this now—will you try for a little while if it would not be possible for you to care for me?"

"Oh, Mr. Faulkner, I cannot!" she only answered.

"Do not punish me so cruelly as to force me to think that I have made you unhappy," he said to her, after a minute's silence. "Look—I cannot tell you to forget what I have said, but let me give you my promise not to speak of it again for

another year. Go to this lady, if you would like to do it, and, a year after this, let me ask you again if you will come to me."

"Oh! no. I want you *never* to ask me that again," she said.

"Do you like me even less, then, than I had dared to think you did?" he asked her, sadly enough, after another silence. "God knows I had not been so vain as to suppose you would ever feel for me as I do for you, but, during these last months, have we not so far been friends that you might at least entertain the possibility of our becoming something more?"

"No—no!" she cried again hastily, almost—or he fancied so—with a kind of shudder.

And then there was a long pause. What more could either of them say?

"Oh, Mr. Faulkner, why have you done this?" she broke out, almost bitterly at last

(she was the first to break the silence).

“You have ended everything by doing it—you have spoilt everything. It has been such a pleasure to see you. You know how I have liked your visits; you know how I have liked to consult you about everything, just as I would have consulted my father,—or a brother, if I had had one. You ought to have known—surely you *might* have known—that I had no feeling for you that would—that would make it *possible*——”

“Do you think that I accuse you, of having tried to deceive me?” he said, when she had broken off, leaving her sentence unfinished.

“No, I do not think you accuse me of that; you are too just to do it. But, if you knew that I did not care for you—how could you ask me? Did you think that I should agree to be your wife, just that I might secure myself a home?”

And then he made no answer to her—  
for was not that in truth the thing that he  
*had* expected ?

He made no immediate answer to her,  
but, after a few moments' silence—

“ I suppose I thought,” he said bitterly,  
“ what many another man has done—that I  
loved you so well that I could win you.  
And, Anne Warwick”—he looked at her  
suddenly, and the colour came into his face,  
“ in spite of what you have said to me—in  
spite of how you feel to me now,—if I live,  
I will try to win you yet. Perhaps I have  
no right to say this—I may neither have  
the right to say it nor to do it,—but I tell  
you I *will* do it ; I will go on hoping to  
have you for my wife till I see you—what  
I pray God I may *never* see you—the wife  
of another man.”

“ Oh, hush !—oh, don't say any more !”  
she cried, almost with a sob.

He obeyed her, and did not speak again. After a long silence he only said gravely,

"I have made a bad business of to-day's work. We have been friends hitherto in a sort of way, and now I suppose you will tell me that I am not to see you again? But if you care to do anything I ask you, do not tell me that. Why should we let other people know what has passed between us? You need not be afraid that I shall repeat what I have said now. You have closed my lips for many a day to come."

"But we could not be at ease with one another any more," she said sadly. "What would be the good of our meeting?"

"Will you at least make the experiment?"

"I don't know. How can I tell what I ought to say?—Oh, do as you like—do as you think best," she said wearily.

"It will not be for long, you know, if you

go to this Mrs. Willoughby. I suppose you have really decided to write to her?"

"Yes. I suppose so."

"Well, write and offer yourself. You can but try it."

"Yes."

She has made her last answers to him in an absent way ; suddenly she looked up to him with a hurried doubtful inquiry in her face.

"Mr. Faulkner, before you go, tell me one thing. Was this what you said to Papa that last day?"

He flushed a little, and for a moment did not answer her ; then—"Yes," he said quietly.

"Ah, if I had guessed!"

She turned away with the tears starting. Her father had died, then, thinking that she would marry Mr. Faulkner—thinking that her future was secure, and blessing them both in his heart. She was an impulsive



woman. She turned away for a moment or two, and then all at once she went to Mr. Faulkner, and held out both her hands to him.

"I would do it if I could. Oh, believe me, I would say Yes to you if I could!" she said.

"I do believe you," he answered.

He had taken the hands she offered him, and after he had held them a few moments he lifted them to his lips and kissed them.

"You have nothing to reproach yourself with. I have nothing to blame you for. God bless you!" he said. And then he left her, and she sat down again in the seat from which she had risen, feeling as if a thunderbolt had fallen upon her.

Why had he done this thing? She sat still for an hour, with her hands upon her lap, trying to think, and yet hardly thinking—trying in vain to recall what each

of them had said. She was still sitting so—idle, bewildered, miserable—when her cousin came in from her afternoon's work.

"Well, dear, what have you been doing?" Lucy asked, as she entered the room; and then Anne sighed and looked up, like one awakening from a dream.

"What have I been doing? I don't know. I wish I did," she said.

"You wish you knew what you have been doing? Why, have you been asleep?"

Anne laughed. "That is a pleasant idea. I should like to think I had."

"What an odd thing to say!"

"There are many odd things in the world, my dear."

"And I think there are many odd people. Has anybody been here?"

"Oh yes."

"Who?" This was asked quickly.

"The Springfields' footman, and the Lumsdens' maid,—and Mr. Faulkner."

"Oh!—and nobody else?"

"These are a host—are they not?"

"A host!—no, I should say not. I thought you might perhaps have had some more callers. It is such a fine day."

"I couldn't have borne any more of them."

"You talk as if you had had to entertain the maid and the footman. What did they bring?"

"One of them brought a note—there it is—and the other brought a novel."

"And you have been reading the novel, I suppose?"

"No, I have not. One is as good as a novel to oneself sometimes."

"I wonder what you mean by that? Did Mr. Faulkner stay long?"

"Yes, a great deal too long."

"Poor man!"

"Why should you call him poor because he stayed too long?"

"What *are* you going on about, Anne?"

"I am going on about Mr. Faulkner."

"Well, then, you had better stop, I should say, for you are talking nothing but nonsense."

"Do you think I have been talking nonsense all the time you have been away?"

"How can I possibly say? Perhaps you have,—only that I don't think you could talk nonsense long to Mr. Faulkner."

"Ah, that is just the question. I suspect I sent him away by what I said."

"Oh, Anne!"

"I think I did."

"Why, what did you say to him?"

"My dear, how in the world can I remember that? Do you think I make a note of the things I say?"

"What an absurd humour you are in, Anne! There is no talking to you, so I'll go and take my bonnet off."

"I wish you had never put it on."

"You wish I had never put my bonnet on!"

"Exactly."

"Now what *do* you mean by that?"

"Lucy, shall I tell you something?"

"I wish you would, if you have anything to tell."

"I have been quarrelling with Mr. Faulkner."

"That is just what I was beginning to think."

"And now, as my hand is in, I am going to quarrel with you."

"I don't think you are going to do anything of the sort."

"Then you are wrong. Come here, for I am about to make a clean breast of the

whole business. Do you know I asked Mr. Faulkner to come here to-day because you were going out?"

"Oh, you did not!"

"Well, you may say I didn't, if you like, but what is the good of saying it when I did? I wanted him by myself; and now I am going to tell you what I wanted him for.—Lucy," cried the girl suddenly, breaking off, and stretching out her arms with all at once a weary, yearning look and tone—"Lucy, come here and kiss me. We have been very happy together, have we not? You have liked to have me here, haven't you?"

She lifted up her lips; as her cousin stooped to her, she put her arms for a moment tight about her neck. Miss Carstairs kissed her without speaking; there was an odd look, half of expectation, half of fear, on Lucy's face. At that moment perhaps

she was more nearly guessing the truth than, in spite of her professions about making a clean breast, Anne at all meant that she should guess it.

But Miss Warwick, reckless as she seemed, was pretty well accustomed to be mistress of herself and her own secrets. She might choose occasionally to arouse suspicion, but she could divert it when it was aroused with considerable dexterity.

"Well, you have liked to have me," she said, "and I have liked to be with you; but it must come to an end now. Mr. Faulkner says it had better *not* come to an end—but he is wrong. Lucy. I called him in to take part with me, and instead of that he has taken part against me. But I can't help his taking part against me. If nobody will help me to do right, then I will do right all by myself, *without* any help; and if people oppose me I will quarrel with them all, as

I have quarrelled with Mr. Faulkner."

Having made which pacific speech, Miss Warwick leant back in her chair, and calmly folded her hands.

"But, Anne, what do you mean? Dear, I don't know what it is that you want to do?" Miss Carstairs said anxiously.

"I want to go and teach Mrs. Willoughby's little girls."

"Oh, Anne!"

"Well, of course you say, 'Oh, Anne!' Everybody says 'Oh, Anne!' whenever I want to have my own way. Why am I not to have my way as well as other people?"

"I wonder when it is that you *don't* have it! What a thing to say! You have your own way constantly. Who is there who ever has a chance against you? But, my darling, you don't mean this? You are not speaking seriously? You don't really mean that you want to go away?"



"You are worse than Mr. Faulkner, Lucy. He believed what I said, at any rate."

"But he told you that you were wrong to think of it. Now you allowed that he did that."

"He talked a great deal of nonsense, my dear; but then, as I said, I quarrelled with him."

"It is very easy to put down people's arguments by quarrelling with them."

"Well, that is perhaps a matter of opinion. I didn't find it easy to put him down."

Miss Warwick said this rather *sotto voce*.

"What do you say?"

"I say he is rather a troublesome person to argue with."

"You found him so because he had reason on his side. But, Anne, my darling——"

"I wish you wouldn't call me your darling, when I want to fight with you ; and I wish you wouldn't come and kiss me. I have kissed you once, and now keep back till this is over. Lucy, I am not jesting now, I am not going to jest any longer, but you must let me go."

"Ah ! my dear, not yet."

"You would say 'Not yet' whenever I proposed it. Do you not know that you would ? And the longer I put off going the less you would allow that there was any reason for me to go. But, Lucy, you are wrong. What is the good of trying to keep people against their will ? I want to earn something. Why, even Mr. Faulkner gave in before he went away, and told me to do what I liked."

"It was easy for *him* to tell you so. What does it matter to him ?"

"Well, he seemed to think it mattered to

him. He was almost as solemn as you are at first about it."

"And then, you mean to say, you got him to take the same view that you do?"

"I don't say anything about his taking the same view that I do. I don't know anything about his views, but—well, I suppose what he said was this, that—that a wilful woman had better have her way."

Miss Warwick rose from her seat at these last words with a laugh.

"Oh, Lucy, it's rather a weary world—rather a weary world!" she said suddenly as she stood up, and stretched her arms in a tired way above her head. "Why do we go so much at cross purposes, I wonder, and one of us want what another can't give?"

"*You* could give us what we want easily enough, if you liked," poor Lucy answered.

"That is what you think, is it? Ah, Lucy, you are wrong—you are wrong—you are wrong!" Anne said.

## CHAPTER VII.

MISS WARWICK wrote her letter next day to Mrs. Willoughby, but she did not find it an easy letter to write. It was the first time in her life that she had ever offered herself for the acceptance of another person, and endeavoured to catalogue her acquirements, and she did not find the task one that was much to her mind. But after she had spoilt several sheets of paper, she at last completed a note that was very simple and direct, and she despatched this, and waited for her answer.

When it came the answer was a very kind

and pleasant one. Mrs. Willoughby was not a stranger to Anne. She had met her several times, and liked her. "I am sorry, for your sake," she wrote, "that you find it necessary to become a governess, but I am glad for my own. If you think you would like to come to me, I, for my part, shall be very glad to have you." And then her letter went on to speak of the salary she offered her, and the time at which she would like her teaching to begin.

"It is a nice note. She could not write more kindly, could she?" Anne said to Mr. Faulkner, on the afternoon of the day on which it came.

Mr. Faulkner had not come to the Hall, but he had met the two cousins out of doors, and had walked a little way with them; and Anne had taken Mrs. Willoughby's letter out of her pocket, and given it to him to read.

"She could not write more kindly, could she?" she said.

"No, it is a very good letter," he replied. "It leaves you nothing more to do, I suppose, but to accept."

"No, nothing more, I think."

"And you will go on the 1st of March?"

"Yes."

And then, without any further remark, he gave the letter back.

"Do you not think it is all a foolish business, Mr. Faulkner?" Lucy said, in an aggrieved way. "I know that you don't agree with her, because she allowed that you did not."

"Lucy, that is not a fair statement. I told you that Mr. Faulkner gave in to me."

"Yes; but giving in is not the same as agreeing,—is it, Mr. Faulkner?"

"My feeling is that she had better do as she thinks best," he said.

"There, Lucy!" And Anne's tone was rather triumphant.

"I don't know why you should say that. She is quite as likely to make mistakes as other people."

"Yes," he replied, after a moment, "quite as likely; but then other people are content to keep out of mistakes by taking the advice of their friends, and Miss Warwick apparently always prefers to gain experience for herself."

"That is a severe speech to make," Anne said rather quickly.

"I did not mean it to be severe. But severe or not," he added, after a moment, "is it not true?"

"I don't know," she said. She spoke a little unwillingly. "I am sure I often take advice. I have taken advice from you."

"Not often, I think."

"Yes, often."

"I don't think you could give any instance, Anne."

"You know nothing about it, Lucy. How should you know?" And Miss Warwick turned upon her cousin in a rapid way that was not unusual with her, but that startled people sometimes. "When I had no other friend but him beside me, do you think I did not do what he told me?"

Now, for what purpose, good or evil, Anne Warwick made this speech, it would have been hard to say. After what had passed between them, one would have thought she had no need to recall times to Mr. Faulkner when they had been thrown together more than they were now, and when she had found his presence and his aid a consolation to her; but she was just the kind of woman to do unwise, impulsive things of this sort, and to be tender to a lover whose suit she could not accept.



“ Anne, why do you say such snappish things to me sometimes ? I don’t mind it when we are alone, but I do think it is a shame to do it before other people,” poor Lucy said presently, in a tone of reproach, when Mr. Faulkner had gone on his way ; and then Anne frankly admitted that it was a shame, and begged her cousin’s pardon.

“ Only why did you provoke me by saying a thing that was not true ?” she asked, in her defence. “ You had no business to say that I don’t take advice from Mr. Faulkner.”

“ But I don’t think you take advice from anyone.”

“ I don’t take it from people who don’t know how to give advice that is not worth taking ; but there is nobody—there is *nobody*—whose advice I should value more than Mr. Faulkner’s.”

“ Well, I suppose, if you say so——”

"I don't know how you can possibly help knowing it. Why, in this very matter of Mrs. Willoughby—was he not the first person that I spoke to?"

"I don't exactly see how that helps you to prove your case. He was the first person that you spoke to, certainly ; but if you mean to put this forward as an instance of how you take his advice——"

And then Miss Warwick bit her lip. She bit her lip for one moment, and in the next she laughed.

"Ah, well, that was a slip of the tongue. I will say nothing more about Mrs. Willoughby. But, whatever I may have done in that matter, Lucy, I have taken Mr. Faulkner's advice in most others where I have ever consulted him at all. And I like to take it."

"Very well. I am glad you do."

"I think he is such a good man."

"Nobody doubts that."

"I never said anybody doubted it. But you seem to think goodness is a very contemptible quality."

"I am sure I do nothing of the sort."

"You always speak so coolly of Mr. Faulkner."

"What nonsense, Anne! I am sure you often speak more coolly of him than I do."

"Well, that has nothing to do with it."

And with this bold and entirely irrelevant assertion, Miss Warwick chose to conclude the conversation.

There was very little said to anyone about Anne's going away. "We need not set people gossiping about it yet," Lucy said, in a tone of entreaty; and Anne answered that she did not care whether they gossiped about it or not; so, being indifferent over the matter, she pleased her cousin by holding her tongue about it.

But Mr. Carstairs, of course, was told that his niece was going to leave him, and he received and commented upon that intelligence with his usual graciousness.

"And so you think," he said to Anne, "like many another silly woman, that you want to be independent? Well, you have got a home here, and five-and-twenty pounds a year to buy your gowns with; and if you have common sense, *I* should say you would be contented with that. But please yourself, Anne. If you think it will make you happy to teach a couple of troublesome brats, go and teach them by all means. You're welcome to go,—and you're welcome to come back."

"Thank you for telling her that, Papa," Lucy said, when her father made this speech.

"Thank me for what?—for telling her she may come back? Well, she may be a

fool, but she is my sister's child, so I'm not likely to shut my doors against her," Mr. Carstairs said.

And then Anne, too, with perhaps a little colour in her face, thanked her uncle for his hospitality.

It had come to be mild weather after the frost, while these things were being settled. The new year, too, had come, and Christmas holiday-makers were thinking of going back to work. One day Mr. Hilton came to the Hall, and said that he was going to London in a few days.

"I am obliged to be in town by the 12th," he said.

It was the 6th now, and he seemed to imply by his tone that he was not looking forward with any eagerness to his departure.

"How little I have seen of you since I have been here!" he ventured to say to

Anne once, half aloud, at a moment when Lucy's back was turned.

"Yes. I am not going out at present, you know," she merely answered; and then Lucy rejoined them, and nothing more was said.

But, at the end of his call, when he was about to take his leave of them, Miss Carstairs said hastily,

"You are not going to bid us good-bye now, are you? We—we shall see you again before you go?"

"Oh, yes, I will come again," he answered at once.

"I wonder if you could not come one day and dine with us? Papa would like so much to see you." (This was quite a fiction on Lucy's part, but she was hardly conscious, perhaps, that it was so. To *her* a sight of Frederick Hilton was beautiful as a vision of one of the Seraphim.) "Papa would like so much to see you. Could

you come on Wednesday—or Thursday?”

“I should be delighted to come on Thursday,” he said.

“Oh, then, do. We—Papa would be so glad.”

And, after this, Mr. Hilton took his leave, expressing the pleasure he should have in gratifying Mr. Carstairs.

“Humph! I don’t know what you need have asked him for; *I* don’t want to see the man,” was, I am obliged to confess, Mr. Carstairs’ remark when he was told of the invitation. “You have no sense in these matters, Lucy. What’s the use of setting me to dine with a scented coxcomb like that?”

“But I thought I could hardly help asking him when he is going away, Papa,” Lucy ventured to say, timidly.

“Oh, he is going away, is he? You may take my word for it, he will be back again

soon enough. He's never long away, that I can see."

And with that Mr. Carstairs turned on his heel, leaving poor Lucy's heart, I am afraid, sore within her.

But yet, though her father made her heart sore, even his contempt could not rob it of its gladness, when the day to which she had looked forward came, and the splendid hero of her dreams entered the drawing-room, where she and Anne were awaiting him. A splendid hero, in a faultless white tie—scented too, as Mr. Carstairs had said. Were the two women very foolish because they smiled on him as he entered and came up and greeted them? He was a handsome man: his was the sort of face upon which very many women smile.

They were both very glad to see him: they could not help it if they were made so



that they liked him. I think Lucy had dressed her hair twice over this afternoon, that she might look well in his eyes; and even Anne had given an extra glance into the glass before she descended to the drawing-room. Anne had prevented him on that other day from telling her that he loved her; but would she, in her heart, have been very glad to hear on this day that he did not love her any more?

"My dear," she said to Lucy, "you look so nice in that gown. I always think that black is so becoming to fair people;" and she looked at her cousin kindly and admiringly.

But would she have looked at her quite either so kindly or so admiringly if she had not very certainly known that in the eyes of the guest who was coming presently the degree of becomingness in Miss Carstairs's dress would matter no more, or hardly any

more, than the set of her father's coat, or the whiteness of the butler's necktie ?

I am afraid Anne Warwick was very far from being a perfect woman. She did not want—or she thought she did not want—to marry this man, and yet she was half willing to keep him as her lover. She ought not to have been willing at all to keep him as her lover, especially when some other woman wanted him ; but yet she did it, and thought, or persuaded herself that she thought, she was doing nothing that it was wrong to do. “ He will go to Lucy sooner or later,” she used to say to herself. “ What is the harm of letting him talk to me a little now when—when we know that it can never come to anything ?” And so she satisfied her conscience, which, perhaps, in this matter, was not a very tender one. But I think, on the whole, it was rather hard for Lucy.

Perhaps there have been more cheerful dinner-parties than the one that gathered presently round Mr. Carstairs's table.

"How do you do, sir? A fine evening? Oh, yes, it's a fine evening," was Mr. Carstairs's careless greeting to his guest, as he came into his drawing-room just before dinner was announced, and, with a cool nod, extended a lifeless hand to Mr. Hilton. "Will you take my daughter?" he said next moment; and then they moved to the dining-room, and seated themselves there in a solemn silence that even Anne did not care at once to break.

"You are going back to town, I hear, sir?" said Mr. Carstairs, when grace had been murmured.

"Yes, I go up on Saturday," replied Mr. Hilton.

"You will soon have Parliament meeting."

"Yes—in about three weeks."

"I don't know what these men mean to make of it. If we don't have a change soon we shall have the country going to the devil."

"Well, they seem to have a pretty good support still in the House."

"Good support, do you call it? What's the use of a support like that? Support of Radicals and beardless boys! Humph!—Sherry!" said Mr. Carstairs, and closed his lips; and then the burden of the conversation was left to be sustained by the other three members of the party.

The ladies adjourned very early to the drawing-room, and Mr. Hilton followed them after only a very short delay.

"What do you drink?—claret?" said Mr. Carstairs, as he and his visitor were left together.

"Thank you. I'll merely take a single glass," replied Mr. Hilton.

So he drank his glass, the silence between the two men remaining almost unbroken while he did it; and then he murmured something, and rose from his chair.

"You will find the ladies in the drawing-room. I suppose you are going to join them?" said Mr. Carstairs.

"Yes, I think I will join them," replied Mr. Hilton; and then his host gave him a nod, and Mr. Hilton made his exit, and went to the drawing-room, and found Anne and Lucy there, sitting by the fire.

He had endured his penance, and now these two women began to pet him and minister to him. It was a cold evening, but Lucy's pretty drawing-room was warm and bright with ruddy fires and soft wax lights.

"Is it not far nicer here than in the dining-room? Are you not glad that you have eaten your dinner and drunk your

wine, and done all the solemn things that have been expected of you?" Anne said to him, in her outspoken way, turning her face to him as he came in, with little enough doubt, I daresay, of what his answer to her speech would be.

"Yes, this is a great deal better than the dining-room. This is better than most things," he said, with rather a drop in his voice at the last words.

And then he came and took a seat near the fire too, and they made much of him. They chatted to him, and paid him the half-unconscious flattery that women so often do to men they like. Anne laughed at him, and teased him; and yet, even while she teased him, looked into his face with womanly, kind, almost tender eyes, that took the sting out of every sharp word she spoke.

I suppose they were all happy enough as

they sat there. Even Lucy was happy, for, if Anne was the sun to Mr. Hilton—who might represent the earth that she attracted,—Miss Carstairs might at least take the consolation of considering herself as a sort of pallid moon—the second, if only the second at a great distance—to that splendid luminary.

After they had talked for a good while, Anne went to the piano. Sometimes, when Miss Warwick was not staying at the Hall, Lucy was in the habit of playing and singing to any guests who asked her for that entertainment. She could play a few pieces pleasantly enough; she sang simple songs in rather a sweet voice; but she never either played or sang to any visitors when Anne was in the room to take her place, and do that business for her. “It would be so foolish in me to do what you can do so much better,” she had said so

often, that, long before this time, the matter had come to be settled and accepted, and Anne had ceased to offer any opposition to the arrangement that it had pleased Miss Carstairs to make. So to-night, when, after they had drunk their coffee, some words were said about music, and Lucy, opening the piano, called Anne to come to it, Miss Warwick rose and took her place there as a matter of course.

Perhaps Anne Warwick had never put it forward to herself as an object for which she should strive, that she should teach herself to sing so that she might be able to sing men's hearts away ; but, if she had not done it consciously, unconsciously, at any rate, she *had* worked to secure that end—and possibly had known before this that, in some cases, she had accomplished it. She sat down to the piano now, and sang. She sang one song, and then another, and



another. She had a soothing, dreamy habit between her songs of playing soft, wandering interludes, letting her fingers run over the notes, and pass by sweet harmonies from key to key. She did this because it pleased her, but yet there was an art in doing it. She knew that she increased the effect of her singing by lapping her hearers in a soft labyrinth of harmonious sounds: she spun her web round them like a cunning spider: she knew very well that those "tones of linked sweetness long drawn out" were a kind of spell, to hold their ears and hearts.

For a long time to-night she went on singing and weaving her soft, dreamy music, and for a long time no one spoke. She was a great talker at most times, but she had art enough never to mingle talk with her singing.

She sang, and the others listened. After

more than half an hour had passed she moved her hands at last from the keys, and turned round to the other two.

"Well, that is enough of it," she said, abruptly.

"Enough, is it? I don't think *I* should feel that it was enough," Mr. Hilton said, "if you went on singing till midnight."

"That is all you know," she replied quietly.

She had too much wisdom to feed either Mr. Hilton or any other man upon sweet sounds until they should begin to pall upon his palate. She rose up with a laugh after she had made that answer, and closed the piano.

Mr. Carstairs had come into the room, and was reading or dozing over his newspaper. He had a special chair where, in the evenings, he used to sit—a special lamp that was held sacred to his use. He used

to occupy this chair every Winter night for an hour or two after dinner, and usually, during this hour or two, a solemn silence reigned in the room ; and Anne and Lucy, when they talked to one another, talked almost in whispers, lest they should disturb either his studies or his slumbers, as the case might be.

But, of course, when there was company at the Hall, they could not talk in whispers, and Mr. Carstairs, if he did not choose to join their talk, had to pursue those studies or slumbers in spite of it. Perhaps, if the truth were told, he might have done the same with small inconvenience to himself on every evening, but it had come to be the custom of the house to believe—or to act as if it believed—that on common nights the sanctity of Mr. Carstairs's repose must remain undisturbed, and Lucy had not the courage, and Anne perhaps did not care, to oppose,

or try to break, this pious habit. He had come into the room while Anne was singing, and he was nodding behind his newspaper when she rose from the piano.

“Papa sometimes gets sleepy in the evenings,” Lucy said to Mr. Hilton apologetically; and Mr. Hilton made some civil answer, which did not say, but which undoubtedly meant, that Mr. Carstairs could do no better thing than sleep. And then these three, who were young, and whom prosperity or or self-indulgence had not cursed yet with crabbed tempers, began to entertain one another again.

They talked, and laughed, and jested. It was a strange thing to Anne afterwards to look back upon it all—to recall their thoughtless words, to remember their gay laughter, to think how lightly she had played the part that she had played before.

so often, for the last time in all her life to-night. That light, gay part of a careless girl, and a coquette. She thought of it afterwards a thousand—ten thousand times. This man was going away, and, though she had no right to do it, she tried to charm him in this last hour before he went: he was in love with her, and, though she did not love him, she tried to make her beauty more beautiful, her wit brighter to him before he left her.

“Are you going?” Lucy said, when at last he rose to take his leave.

It was nearly eleven o'clock: she knew he hardly could stay later, and yet her question had a regretful tone in it. “When shall I see you again?” it seemed to say. “We have been so happy together—must we part now?” She got up from her seat, and put out her hand reluctantly to him.

“You won’t be away long? I suppose,

at any rate, you will be here at Easter?" she said.

"Well, I don't know—it is hard to say," he answered. "I *hope* I may be back at Easter, but one never knows."

He shook hands with her, and then with Anne.

"*Au revoir*," Anne merely said for her farewell, but she looked in his face as she uttered those two words, and he went away from her believing (and perhaps at the moment she almost meant him to believe) that she wanted him to come back.

## CHAPTER VIII.

IT had been on a Thursday that Mr. Hilton had dined at the Hall. He was to leave for town on the following Saturday. On that Saturday evening Mr. Carstairs was sitting at dinner with his daughter and his niece, and the soup had just been served and was being eaten, when the silence which generally at Mr. Carstairs's table accompanied that ceremony was broken by an unusual movement on the part of the grave servant who filled the post of butler.

"Ahem!" said this personage suddenly from the back of his master's chair, with so

evident an intention of attracting attention that Mr. Carstairs lifted up his head and looked an inquiry from under his bushy eye-brows.

"Ahem!" repeated the man solemnly. "I don't know, sir, whether you've heard about the accident."

"About the accident?" repeated Mr. Carstairs, laying down his spoon. "No, what accident?"

"On the line, sir."

"What, another railway accident?"

"Yes, sir, the 5.20 up. A great many people killed, I believe, sir."

"Oh!"

It was not Mr. Carstairs who made this ejaculation, but poor Lucy, from whose lips every drop of blood had suddenly gone. She half rose from the table, and then sat nervously down again. I think the colour was leaving Anne's face too.



"What's the matter? Do you know anybody who was to be in that train?" Mr. Carstairs said, turning sharply round to the two women.

For a moment neither of them spoke, and it was the butler who replied to his master's question.

"I was down making inquiries at the station just now, sir. Yes, sir, they say Mr. Faulkner was in the train."

"God bless me! I'm sorry for that."

"And Mr. Hilton, sir."

"Dear me! Why, was it to-day Hilton was going up to town?"

He looked at his daughter, but Lucy could not speak. It was Anne who said "Yes," in place of her.

"It was another train that went into them, sir, just as they were leaving Hepstone station."

"What, so near us as that?"

"Yes, sir. They say they're to bring the bodies here."

"Oh, Anne!" poor Lucy broke out piteously, in a sudden tone of agony so wild and bitter that it was like a cry.

"Hush! You had better come away," Anne said sharply, setting a hard fierce kind of restraint upon herself; and she rose and took her cousin by the arm—not gently—and took her from the room.

Mr. Carstairs looked after the two girls as they retired, and gave a dry, short cough.

"The next time you hear of a thing of this kind we'll take your news at the *end* of dinner, Saunders, if you please," he said.

"Yes, sir," replied Saunders, with a face of stone; and proceeded to remove his master's plate.

Mr. Carstairs ate the rest of his meal in silence, and only spoke again when the

table had been cleared and Saunders had placed the decanters in front of him.

"You had better go down and see what more you can learn about this business," he said then.

"Yes, sir," replied Saunders; and then, lingering doubtfully for a moment, "Richards has just come in, sir."

"Oh, Richards has been looking after the accident, too, has he? Well, and what news does *he* bring?"

"He says the bodies have arrived, sir."

"Whose are they, then?"

"There's Mr. Faulkner, sir——"

"Ah! dear me, is he really killed?"

"So I believe, sir. But the others are only poor men. You wouldn't know them, sir. There's a son of old Ben Hutchins's."

"And Mr. Hilton—what about him?"

"Oh, he's all right, sir. Richards saw him."

"I am sorry for poor Faulkner. Go and see what they are doing with him, Saunders."

"Yes, sir."

"And of course learn anything else you can about the others. It's a sad pity about Faulkner."

Mr. Carstairs sat over his wine for half an hour, and then he went to the drawing-room, but neither his niece nor his daughter was there. He rang the bell, and asked if Miss Carstairs was not coming to make tea; and this inquiry in a few minutes brought Lucy in, with a nervous, tremulous look in her face still, but not with the same look of despair that it had worn an hour ago. She poured out her father's tea, and carried it to him.

"Where's Anne?" he asked, as he took it from her.

"She is not going to come down. She is

so distressed about Mr. Faulkner," Lucy replied.

"Oh, she's distressed about *him*, is she? I thought it was the other fellow—Hilton," Mr. Carstairs said.

"But Mr. Hilton has not been hurt," Lucy said softly.

"So the one who has had his head broken is the favourite for the moment, is he? Well, I wish, for my own part, that it had been Hilton's brains that had been knocked out, and not poor Faulkner's."

"It is terribly sad—whichever of them—" Lucy began tremulously, and then could not finish her sentence.

"Sad enough for themselves, no doubt, but I don't see why *you're* to begin to whimper about it. Give me another cup of tea," said Mr. Carstairs, sharply; and then Lucy poured him out a second cup.

"Don't sit with me, Lucy," Anne had

said to her cousin. "When I am wretched I don't want companionship."

She had spoken, and she knew that she had spoken, harshly. A gentler woman than she would have submitted to Lucy's sympathy, but Anne, when she was in trouble, had a cold, almost cruel way of shutting herself up, and going away with her grief into some lonely place.

"I don't want anybody to stay with me. Come back when Saunders returns, and tell me what he says; but leave me alone till then. I can't talk or be talked to," she had said. And so Lucy had gone away, and for an hour Anne had sat alone and thought.

The man who they had feared at first might have been injured was safe and well. Lucy's maid had brought that news up to her mistress, and Lucy's flood of grief and terror had been turned by the tidings into a flood of gratitude. "Oh, thank God!

thank God!" the girl had cried; and, forgetting all reserve for the moment, and kneeling at Anne's side, she had thrown her arms about her cousin's waist, and sobbed aloud, in a great abandonment of joy. And Anne also had thanked God, but not as Lucy had done. "Oh, Anne, are you not glad?" poor Lucy said, forgetting everything except that Mr. Hilton was safe; and when Anne answered passionately, "How can I be glad?" she looked up startled, not understanding for the moment what her cousin meant. For to her Mr. Faulkner was nothing, and Frederick Hilton was all the world; and I think, though her ears had heard it, her mind had scarcely even taken in as yet that part of her maid's report which told her that Mr. Faulkner was dead. But Anne had taken in that part of the report, and it had stunned her like a great blow struck in her face.

He had been the best friend she had, the kindest friend, the man who loved her best in all the world. It was only a week ago that she had seen him ; it was scarcely four months ago yet since she had first begun to know how good he was,—since he had comforted her father ; and now her father and he—they were both dead.

She sent Lucy away from her, and she sat alone thinking all this. "I could not have been anything to him though he had lived—I could never have done what he wanted—but we might have been—oh, I wanted us so to be friends !" she cried to herself. But he was dead, and she had thrown a shadow over his last days. She had never done any good thing to him ; he had loved her, and been kind to her in a hundred ways, and for all his kindness she had given him nothing back. The thought of it wrung her heart. If she had given



her promise to him to become his wife, at this moment the knowledge that she had done so would have made her glad.

She sat alone in her room, reproaching herself, and letting her heart bleed. "He was so good ; if I had been half as good, I would have promised to marry him," she thought. "If I had not been so selfish, I would have tried to do it for papa's sake. I am punished now. I might at least have tried to make him happy, and I did not try. He was better to me than I deserved—he was better than anybody else I know ; and now—and now——" the girl said.

She was alone for a long time before Lucy came back to her, but Lucy, when she came at last, entered the room almost with a bright face.

"Oh, Anne, it is not so bad as we thought !" she exclaimed, hurriedly and eagerly. "They always exaggerate so, you

know. There are only three people killed, and Mr. Faulkner is *not* killed—at least, he is not dead yet. He is terribly hurt, they say, but he is alive. That is better than you expected, is it not? Perhaps he will recover. Oh, I hope he will! And Mr. Hilton—he is not hurt at all. He might have gone on to town, only he thought he would come back, in case he could be of any use. Was not that good of him? He spoke to Saunders, and told him how the accident had happened. He says that Mr. Faulkner might have escaped without any hurt, only he tried to help out a little lame girl who was in the carriage with him. You know the other train ran into them. They saw it coming just as they were leaving Hepstone Station, and a great many people were able to jump out in time, and Mr. Faulkner could have done it too, only he stopped to lift out this child; and

then it was too late, and the train came down upon them. But Mr. Hilton is not hurt at all," repeated Lucy, with grateful exultation. "He has gone to Mrs. Osborne's now, and in the morning—oh, I wonder whether in the morning we shall see anything of him before he goes back to town!"

"Tell me something more about Mr. Faulkner," Anne said abruptly. (She was grateful—yes, God knows she was grateful, but yet she had not said a word till she said this.) "What are they doing with him?"

"Oh, they are taking him to Sutton. He is there now, and Dr. Russell is there, and I don't know how many surgeons. They telegraphed to London, and three or four have come down. There are a good many people injured, but I am afraid his case is the worst. I am afraid," and Lucy tried to look very sad—"I am afraid Mr. Hilton thinks he is dreadfully hurt."

"And we can do nothing to-night!" Anne said, in a low, almost bitter voice.

Miss Carstairs looked at her cousin rather perplexedly.

"Do nothing? N—no," she answered, a little hesitatingly. "We can send over early in the morning to inquire, but—oh, no, of course we can do nothing. I wish we could."

"*He* did not say he could do nothing when there was that child's life to be saved."

This rather unreasonable response burst from Miss Warwick with a sharpness that made Lucy open her eyes.

"Oh, but surely that was quite another thing," she said.

"Why did it fall to him to save the child more than to anybody else? It was just like him to do it; but why did nobody else risk his life as well as he?"

"My dear, how can I possibly tell you that?"

"No, you can't tell me—or, at least, you could tell me if you liked, only you won't do it, because you don't want to say he is better than other people."

"I am sure I am quite ready to say that he is better than a great many other people. I think it was a very noble thing in him to do what he did; of course nobody but a brave, kind man would have done it."

"What became of the child? Did he save her after all?"

"Yes, I think so. Her father and mother were with her——"

"And they jumped out, and took care of themselves, I suppose?"

"What a thing to say, Anne! They didn't jump out; but I daresay the man was trying to save his wife—or perhaps they were farther in the carriage—how can I

tell? Mr. Faulkner must of course have seen that he could do something which they could not. It was wonderfully brave of him, I think."

"Do you suppose I doubt that?" Anne asked this question almost fiercely. "But was it worth paying his own life for? That seems to me the question—and do you think any of us can answer it?"

She rose from her seat; she knew she was too unreasonable, too irritable, too sore at heart to be fit to go on talking.

"Lucy, forgive me, and go away to bed," she said. "I should like to cry if I could, but I can't cry, and so, because I can't, I say bad, bitter things. There, kiss me, and go. I will try to be better to-morrow; but I can't be good to-night."

"No, I can't be good to-night. I feel as if I should never be good or happy any more," she said to herself when her cousin

was gone. "Oh, I wish I could see him ! I wish I was at Sutton ! I wish I knew what they were doing to him !" And then she walked up and down her room, and tried to picture the scene to herself that she could not see.

If she had seen it in reality she would have found only a quiet, dimly lighted room, with a white figure lying motionless on the bed. When Mr. Faulkner had been first dragged out from under one of the broken carriages he had been able to speak, and had expressed a desire to be carried to his own house, and had even asked one or two questions about the other sufferers ; but before they had got him to Sutton he had sunk into a state of unconsciousness.

By eight o'clock in the evening the surgeons had made their examination, and had shaken their heads over him, and one of them had suggested that if he had any

near relations they should be telegraphed to. But the servant to whom this proposal was made shook his head. He knew of no relations that Mr. Faulkner had.

"You see, he was an only son, sir," the man said. "There was never any more of them. There's Mr. Travers, to be sure. Master is very intimate with him and Mrs. Travers; but they're no relations, sir."

"If you can get to Mr. Travers, then, you had better send to him," said the surgeon.

"He's in London, sir," the man replied.

"Well, telegraph to him, and he can come or not, as he likes."

So Mr. Travers had been telegraphed for; but meantime Mr. Faulkner lay on his bed without sense or motion, showing only by his slow breathing that he still lived. The surgeons watched him, and spoke gravely by his bedside. It was a case in which at



this point, at any rate, their skill could do little for him. The immediate question was whether he would ever rally enough to recover consciousness. Of the three surgeons who stood round his bed two thought he would sink without rallying.

They were wrong, however, for late in the evening he opened his eyes, his lips moved, and he tried to speak. The surgeons from London had left the house by this time, but Dr. Russell had undertaken to sit up with his patient, and was watching by his bedside.

In the morning, when messages of inquiry began to pour in, the answer returned to all of them was that Mr. Faulkner was conscious, and had passed a quiet night.

In the afternoon of this day, which was Sunday, Mr. Travers arrived at Sutton.

"I had just seen poor Faulkner's name

in the evening papers before your telegram came," he said to Dr. Russell, who came down to receive him. "I am very glad you sent for me. In what state is he?"

"In about as bad a state as he can be," the doctor gravely answered.

"Ah, poor fellow!"

"The injuries are so serious that (I had better speak plainly to you) it is scarcely possible that he should get over them."

"Poor fellow!—poor fellow!"

"He has rallied a good deal since morning. He knows that you are coming, and is looking forward to seeing you."

"Does he know his own danger?"

"Well, I suspect he does. I would rather that he did not know it, but he has asked too many questions for us to be able to keep it from him. He seems to be very anxious about some arrangements that he wants to make. Of course he is not in a fit

state to talk about business, but you must do the best you can with him. If he insists on talking, you must let him do it. I'm afraid, poor fellow, it won't really make much difference, one way or the other, in the end."

Mr. Travers was admitted after a little while into his friend's room, and Mr. Faulkner received him with an eager hand stretched out from the bed-clothes.

"Well, this is an unexpected business—is it not?" he said, with a curious momentary smile on his white lips. "But we needn't waste time in talking of it. They won't let me talk much, you know."

"No—of course not. You must wait till you are stronger," Mr. Travers said.

"I am obliged to you with all my heart for coming, Travers. There are various things that I should like to speak to you about, but there is one thing especially——"

"Well, as soon as the doctors think that you are able——"

"Leave the doctors alone, Travers. They know that I am dying—and so do you. I must say what I want to say now."

"You are not wise, Faulkner."

"You can't tell whether or not I am wise till you hear what I am going to say. There is something I want you to do for me."

"Well?"

"I want you, if it is possible, to arrange something; and the worst is, there is so little time. Now wait a moment, and I will tell you what I mean in as few words as I can."

He paused a few seconds, and put his hand over his eyes. Mr. Travers waited, and, in less than a minute, his friend went on speaking.

"Do you remember the man who used

to be the clergyman here—Mr. Warwick?"

"Yes."

"He had a daughter."

"Yes. I have seen her."

"Of course I have known her nearly all her life—more or less. Two or three weeks ago I—asked her to marry me."

"Well?"

"She did not accept me, but—let that rest there a moment. You know, as I have no children, everything, when I die, goes to that man that I know nothing about—my cousin, William Faulkner. I can't dispose of any part of it; but, if I were to leave a wife, she would be provided for, of course—he would have to allow her eight hundred a year for her life. Do you see?"

"Yes."

"Well, I am coming to it now. Travers"—he stretched out his hand and eagerly grasped his friend's arm—"I may live for

a few days. Can you not manage that I should marry Anne Warwick before I die?"

"My dear fellow, I don't think it would be possible."

"Why should it not be possible? I want you to go and ask her to marry me. Don't you understand? She is poor—she is talking of going out as a governess. If she had this money she would be at ease. I don't think I could rest in my grave if I thought she was having to fight her way in the world."

"But, my dear Faulkner, if she is at all a high-minded woman, I—I don't see how I could possibly propose to her to marry you, simply that she may secure herself an income."

"I don't ask you to do that. Of course you could not do that. But surely the thing could be managed differently. For God's sake, don't say a word about money to her."

Simply tell her that on my death-bed I ask her to do what she would not have done if I had lived. That will move her: she is an impulsive, generous-natured woman. Tell her I want—it is the one thing I want—to call her my wife before I die.”

“I am afraid it is a very strange thing to propose to do.” Mr. Travers said this in an embarrassed way, after a little silence.

“When people are dying, don’t you think that allowance may be made for them?”

“But you don’t know that you are dying. I hope you are not going to die, but to get better.”

“You may hope that,—I don’t doubt that you do,—but you don’t believe it. Travers, I can’t speak much more now. Will you do what I ask you or not?”

“You don’t want me to do anything to-night?”

“Yes, I do. I want you to do something instantly.”

"To see Miss Warwick, do you mean?"

"Yes, to see her—and tell her what I have told you. Travers,"—after a few moments' silence, in a tone of feverish eagerness—"if you won't do this, I must find another messenger."

"Well, don't excite yourself. I will do it."

"Thank you. God bless you! Will you go at once?"

"If you wish it."

"I do wish it. I wish it earnestly. You understand exactly what I want you to say?"

"I suppose I do."

"Tell her, you know, that they think I may live a few days. I don't want to hurry her. Make her understand that, and that I don't ask her to marry me till the doctors fairly give me up. There would have to be a special licence, of course; but you would see to all that, wouldn't you?"



“Oh, yes, of course.”

“Very well, then, that is all. And now go, like a good fellow. Go, and do this for me.”

And then Mr. Travers got up and left the room. He went downstairs rather slowly, very little liking the business that had been committed to him.

“I have been obliged to promise to do something—he has got his head very full of a thing,” he said, in a tone of some annoyance to Dr. Russell, whom he found downstairs. And then, after a few moments’ hesitation, he repeated the substance of his friend’s request to him. The doctor lifted up his eyebrows, and listened in silence.

“It is a wild project. The whole thing is a great pity, but—well, you must humour him,” he said, when the other had told his story. “And if you can persuade Miss Warwick to humour him as well, better do

that too. Get her, at the least, to temporise. Don't let her send a flat refusal. Of course we won't marry her to him against her will—make her understand that—but get her to say something soothing to him; if you can, let her send some message to him that will help to keep him quiet."

"I will do the best I can," Mr. Travers replied, rather lugubriously. And then presently he set out on his errand.

It was a January afternoon, and the Winter light was just fading away as he reached the Hall. He had ridden from Sutton, Mr. Faulkner's groom accompanying him, to guide him on the way.

"I suppose I had better ask at once to see Miss Warwick," he thought to himself as they were approaching the house; so when the door was opened to him he asked for her, and was shown into the drawing-room, where she and Lucy were both sitting.

The servant announced his name as he entered. He had seen both Anne and Miss Carstairs before. As he came forward and greeted them, he said at once,

"I have just come from Sutton."

"Oh, I am so glad. We were so anxious to hear something more. How is he?" Lucy asked eagerly.

"I am afraid there is almost no hope," he gravely said.

He told them a little about his state, and then he turned to Anne.

"I have come just now because he wanted me to bring you a message from him," he said.

He spoke in rather a lowered tone, directing his words pointedly to her. Hitherto she had scarcely opened her lips since he had entered the room—she had only listened; but now, when he said this sentence, the conscious colour came fast into her face.

"Tell it to me," she said quickly.

He hesitated for a moment, and something in his manner made Lucy rise and leave them. He remained silent till she had closed the door, and then he gave his message.

"He has sent me with a request to you," he said, "but I hardly know how to make it. I am such a stranger to you that it seems almost like impertinence—" He had begun to speak without looking at her, with his eyes on the ground. "But I have no choice in the matter. I have learnt from Mr. Faulkner that a few weeks ago he made you a proposal of marriage. He tells me that you rejected it, but now—he has a dying man's fancy—he has sent me here to ask you if you could face the thought of becoming—if you could possibly consent to become—his wife on his death-bed?"

He raised his head as he reached the last

part of his sentence ; their eyes met for a moment as he ceased to speak, and from Anne's lips some murmured sound escaped—not words, but a low half cry of mingled pain and pity.

He paused uneasily for a second or two, but she made no other answer to him, and then he went on speaking again.

“He is quite aware how great and how unusual a thing he is asking from you. Of course nothing but his firm belief that he is dying could justify him in asking it for a moment, or me in being his messenger ; but the desire has taken such a hold upon him—he sends such entreaties that you will yield to it—that you will let him call you his wife before he dies. Miss Warwick, I am most unwilling to urge you—I feel how utterly I am without any right to do it—but I have been forced to bring this message to you ; and I can only say that if it is possible for

you to do what he asks you,—if you can consent to become his wife in this strange way,—you will be doing a very generous thing, for you will comfort his last hours as no one else could comfort them.”

The colour had gone from her face ; she was sitting quite still, with her eyes fixed on Mr. Travers’s face, with a kind of terror in them. What was she to say ?

“ Why need I marry him ? ” she asked suddenly and almost breathlessly. “ I am ready to go to him—this moment, if he will let me. Did he think I would only come to him if I was his wife ? Oh, tell him he is wrong. I am ready to come and stay at Sutton. Tell him that. Will that not be enough ? ”

And then Mr. Travers cleared his throat, and changed his attitude uneasily, for he did not know how to answer her.

“ Well, yes—of course it would be

enough, if he was in a condition to listen to reason—if he could be argued with like an ordinary healthy man,” he replied after a few moments’ silence; “but there is the difficulty, you see, for the point he has set his heart on is the getting you to be his wife—the getting you to bear his name. Of course I have no right to offer you any advice—no one could feel that more than I do—but I think if you could possibly prevail upon yourself to give him at least a kind of provisional promise—something that would have the effect of soothing him. The tendency to excitement, you see, is so great. If you could send back some message by me—worded as carefully as you like—that should have the effect of calming him for the present, of course we would take every care——”

Mr. Travers’s hesitating speech broke off here without coming to any end, and there

was a pause for almost a minute. At the end of that time Anne spoke in a low unnatural voice.

"Tell him—tell him that I will do what he asks," she said.

The words came quickly, but almost with a shudder; her colour had blazed up, and was burning in a hot bright spot on both her cheeks.

"May I really tell him that?" Mr. Travers joyfully asked.

"I will come when he likes,—and at the end—if he wishes it—I will marry him. But it must be *only* at the end—not before; you understand that?" she said hurriedly.

"Certainly. That is all that even he asks."

"Well, say I will come. I should like to come—now, if he cares to have me. He was my father's friend," she began to say in a quick pathetic way. "He has been so



good to me. I would give everything I have—everything I have in the world to save him.”

“I have no doubt if you were so good as to come to him it would comfort him very much.”

“Do you think that? Then I will come.”

She rose up from her seat; he saw that she was too agitated to sit still.

“Of course you will not come to-night. He would not expect you,” Mr. Travers said; “but if I might tell him that he should see you to-morrow——”

“Yes—tell him that.”

“Then I will not intrude upon you any longer now. Only let me say once more that no one could feel more strongly than I do how unfit a person I have been——”

“Oh, it doesn’t matter! Don’t say anything about that—don’t mind about it,” she interrupted him impatiently. And then in

the next instant she held out her hand, and with one of those sudden impulses of hers looked up into his face almost wistfully.

"I mean—I ought to thank you—you have been very considerate and kind. I wish it was not all—so—perplexed—oh, I wish we did not go so at cross purposes with one another!" she said almost with a sob.

He shook his head gravely and turned away. What answer could he make to her?

"Well, she is a beautiful creature," he said to himself as he mounted his horse again. "I don't wonder that Faulkner loves her."

He rode back to Sutton thinking over his interview with her. When he reached the house again he went straight to his friend's room.

"Is it Yes or No?" Mr. Faulkner asked him instantly when he saw him.

"It is Yes," Mr. Travers merely answered.

"God bless her!"

There was a break in the sick man's voice; it was some seconds before he spoke again. After a little silence, "Tell me everything," he said. "I am not going to talk—they won't let me—but tell me what she said to you."

And then, as he best could, Mr. Travers described his interview.

"She was very much moved. There is no doubt she has a warm regard for you. Of course, I do not mean that she feels to you as you do to her," he ended by saying, "but if you live, Faulkner, I think you ought to be able to make her love you."

"I shall never live long enough to do that," Mr. Faulkner answered.

"I don't feel at all sure that you won't. Doctors are often deceived."

"Yes, and friends too. Why, don't you know that I am half dead—that I am dead

almost up to the waist—already? It is creeping steadily upwards. But never mind, don't let us talk about that. You have given me a medicine that, if anything can, will keep death off for a little while yet. I shall be able to sleep now."


He turned his face away again, and the other left the room. An hour or two afterwards, Mr. Travers said to one of the doctors—"Do you really think there is no hope?"

"Well, no man can ever give a positive answer to such a question as that," the surgeon replied. "Men have rallied after the breath has almost seemed to be out of them; but, speaking simply from my own experience in similar cases, I should say, no, there is next to no hope at all. Why, even if he *lives*, it is impossible that he can *recover*. He is quite right—he is half dead already."

"Poor fellow!"

"Yes, poor fellow! Such a strong, healthy man, and in what an enviable position only two days ago!" And then the men gravely shook their heads and parted.

"I must telegraph to Caroline," Mr. Travers said to himself ("Caroline" was Mrs. Travers), "and get her to come here to-morrow." And then he began to speculate on his probable movements during the coming days. "We shall be detained here till after the funeral," he thought. "Miss Warwick, of course, will go back to her uncle's when it is all over, but Carry and I had better remain here. I don't think I need write to William Faulkner. There is no occasion for Faulkner to see him, or for him to be in the house at all, before he has a right to be in it. If Caroline and Miss Warwick both come to-morrow, we shall have quite as many people about him as we need."



And then Mr. Travers went to the library and wrote his telegram. Dr. Russell had sent a nurse, and he met her on the stairs presently, as he was going up to his own room.

“He’s sleeping very quietly, sir. He was very much worn out, but almost as soon as you left him he shut his eyes, and he’s sleeping now just like a child,” she said, in answer to the question that Mr. Travers asked.

## CHAPTER IX.

“**A**ND you are going to him to-morrow? —and you really mean that if he wants it—you really mean that you will marry him, Anne?” Miss Carstairs said, staring at her cousin in blank and breathless surprise.

With characteristic abruptness Miss Warwick had informed Lucy of the message that had been brought to her. Lucy had come back into the drawing-room when their visitor was gone, and had found Anne sitting there with a look on her face as if she had been turned to stone. She

lifted up her eyes as her cousin came towards her, and said simply and instantly,

“Lucy, I have promised to marry him.”

“You have—you have done *what?*” cried the other.

“I have promised to marry him—that is all. He sent Mr. Travers to ask me, and I have said that I will.”

“Oh, Anne!”

“I couldn’t help it. Do you think I could? Do you think I oughtn’t to have promised?”

“My dear, how can *I* tell? *You* are the only one who can know that.”

“It has nothing to do with loving him, you know. I *don’t* love him—but *he* wants it.”

“But I don’t understand, Anne——”

“No, of course you don’t understand. How could you, when I never told you anything? But never mind that. It is what



is to be done *now* that I have to think about. I have promised that I will go to-morrow."

"To Sutton?"

"Yes."

"To—to marry him?"

"Yes."

"But, Anne, what is the good of it?"

"I don't know."

"Then why in the world are you going to do it?"

"Because he asks me. How can I help doing it? Would *you* have said 'No' to him if you had been in my place?"

And then Miss Carstairs did not answer. She might open her eyes wide at what her cousin had done, but how could she reply without any doubt that if she had been in Miss Warwick's place she would have said "No?"

"Lucy, if he were to live, I would never

marry him—never!” Anne said suddenly, with a passionate ring in her voice after they had both been silent for a little while. “Even though it should only be for an hour before he dies, I hate to think that I shall be his wife—I hate to think that I shall have to take his name afterwards. He does not know how hard a thing he has asked me to do; and I think he ought to have known. I think, even though he is dying, he ought (if he had been as good as I had thought he was) to have had self-control enough to hold himself from asking such a thing from me; but—there, I have no business to say this—I am wrong to say it; whether it is true or not makes no difference—I must have said ‘Yes’ to him all the same. And don’t suppose I feel hardly to him, Lucy—I don’t—God knows I don’t! I would give my whole life to save his. Only I think—I think if he had

not done this thing he would have served himself better—I mean I should have mourned for him with a tenderer feeling—I should have believed more in his generosity than I shall ever again believe now.”

The girl's face was burning as she spoke; there was a look in it almost of contempt, which it was well perhaps for Mr. Faulkner that he could not see.

Anne let her scorn live in her all that night, but I think, though she misunderstood her lover still (for could she help misunderstanding him, when no light was given her by which she could read the motive which had led him to do the thing that he had done?) it was not scorn at any rate that was uppermost in her heart when she stood next day upon the threshold of the room in which he lay dying, and knew that in another moment she should see the man

who, whether selfishly or unselfishly, at any rate loved her tenderly enough to make the thought of her his first thought, both in life and death.

She had been received at Sutton only by Mr. Travers, for his wife had not yet arrived. She was very quiet and self-possessed. "A little too quiet," Mr. Travers thought to himself. "She would show more agitation if she cared for him." But still, in the circumstances, her composure was hardly a thing to regret.

"He is asleep now," Mr. Travers said to her. "He is very tractable and patient, and has been trying hard not to excite himself about your coming. I have been thinking that it might be a good plan, if you had no objection to it, for you to go into his room at once, and just sit beside him till he awakes. I don't think he will be startled to find you there, and it would spare him

any further suspense. Do you think you would mind doing that?"

"Oh, no," she merely said.

She laid aside her hat and cloak, and went upstairs with Mr. Travers, without opening her lips again, and he took her into the sick-room. The nurse was sitting by the bedside. They went towards her, and as she rose, Mr. Travers said—

"This is Miss Warwick. She will take your place now."

They had evidently made the arrangement beforehand. In another minute they had both gone away, and Anne was left alone in the room.

She had preserved her self-possession outwardly, but her heart was beating tumultuously, and her hands were trembling as she took her seat in the chair from which the nurse had risen. There was a curtain at the bed's head, and for a little while she

screened herself behind it ; she had only for a moment, as she crossed the room at first, glanced at Mr. Faulkner's face.

He was lying calmly asleep. As she sat back in her chair, she could hear his regular, low breathing. There was no movement of any kind—only the soft breath that rose and fell. She sat motionless, too, for a few moments, and then slowly and unwillingly she bent forward and looked at him.

There was no expression of pain in the calm, colourless face. It was so placid in its white quietness that it was almost like a face to which death had come already. Perhaps she had expected to find some disfigurement—some scar or bruise that should have changed or distorted him ; but there was none ; as it had been in health, so it lay before her now—a strong, calm face, only struck and changed to marble by the shadow of death.

She sat, bent forward, looking at him for a long while. Her eyes filled once with tears as she looked. All that was passionate and generous and self-devoted in her was stirred by the sight of him. "Oh, if I could, I would give my life for him! He is more worthy to live than I am!" she cried to herself.

She had been with him for half an hour when he made a sign of awakening. He sighed and moved, and as he moved she leant back in her chair again. She began to tremble afresh; she wished nervously that the next minute was over. "Will he speak?" she began to ask herself, "or shall I have to speak first, and tell him that I am here?"

She sat quite still for a few moments. She heard no sound any longer, not even the sound now of his breathing. There was perfect silence for about a minute, and then,

suddenly, at the end of that time—as if he was only calling some one who he knew was there—he said her name.

“Anne!”

“Yes,” she answered, softly.

She had been nervous and uncertain what to do till now, but now, all at once, as she replied to him, the necessity for action gave her self-possession: she bent forward again; they looked at one another, and his lips broke into a smile.

“I thought that you were here,” he said gently.

He feebly lifted his right hand, and she saw the movement, and stretched out her own to meet it. Her heart had come suddenly to her lips. She took his hand, and because she could not speak she bent down and kissed it.

“*You* ought not to be the one to do that,” he said.



His fingers had closed over hers, and they did not unloose their clasp again. She would have drawn her hand away from him if it had been in her power to do it, but it was not.

"Ought I to try to thank you for coming to me?" he said to her, after a little silence. "I should like to do it, but I have no words now. I can only say—God bless you!"

"I *wanted* to come," she answered. "I am glad you sent for me."

"I was afraid you would think it was too bold a thing to do."

"I never thought that."

"You did not? Well, that was kind of you—that was like you. Anne,"—these last words were said after a little silence—"it is worth dying to have this."

He looked in her face as he spoke, and what could she say in answer to him? The hand he held seemed to herself to turn cold

in his—her very heart seemed to turn cold.

“I shall not trouble you long, you know,” he said, after another pause. “Travers has told you, has he not? They think I may live for a few days—suppose we call it a week. You will give one week to me—will you?”

“Yes,” she said.

Ought she to have said something more? She felt as if she ought, but the words would not come.

“I think, too, that it won’t be a painful death—they tell me that it will not—nothing that it will distress you much to see.”

“Oh, don’t speak as if you were only thinking of me!”

She broke out with this hurriedly, and almost passionately.

“Why should I not speak as if I was thinking of you? As I lie here, what other earthly thing have I to think of or to care

for? Dear," he said suddenly, "do you remember that day, years ago, when you came here, and I met you at the door, and told you that my mother was ill?—do you remember standing in your white frock, with that solemn look of sudden sympathy in your eyes? Ah, well, you have forgotten it, I suppose; but I have a little handful of dead wild-flowers still that you dropped that day."

"Oh, no!—oh, no!—not so long ago as that!" she said. The words came from her almost like a cry for pity.

"Are you sorry that it was so long ago? My darling, you must not mind it. I was little more than a boy then. It was only a young man's fancy—nothing but that. I went away, you know: I forgot you, perhaps. Do you want me to say that I forgot you? I will try to say it if it will make you content."

"No, no, it doesn't matter," she said sadly.

"No, it doesn't matter now; that is true. It won't harm you presently to know that you have been dear to me so long, and I shall not live, you know, to make my love a burden to you.—Anne, do you forgive me for what I have asked you?"

He said this suddenly, after they had been silent for a moment or two. She *did* not forgive him; but what could she say?

"Is there anything to forgive?" she only replied, in a voice so low that he could hardly hear her.

"Anything? Yes—as you look at it, a great deal," he answered quickly. "But, dear, don't judge me yet. Wait till it is all over, if you can." And then, when she was silent, "Will you do that?" he said.

"Yes," she answered gently.

He half disarmed her by his tenderness,

and yet by that very tenderness half hardened and repelled her too. For she could not look at him and not pity him ; she could not listen to the words he spoke and not be moved by them ; and yet all the while in her heart there was a fierce under-current of rebellion against him—of anger at her own pity—a bitter sense that he had taken advantage of her—that under cover of what he called his love for her he was doing a selfish and ungenerous thing. He told her not to judge him, and she answered that she would not ; but she had judged him already, even when she said that. He was strong and brave and kind ; he was better than a thousand other men perhaps ; but he was self-deceived, and he was trying to deceive her ; he loved himself better than he loved her. She sat thinking this as her passive hand lay in his,—sat thinking it painfully, hotly, indignantlly ; and yet even

through her indignation her heart was sad and sore for him.

“Am I keeping you with me too long?” he said to her, wistfully, after a little while. They had not spoken since his last question to her, and perhaps he felt instinctively that in the silence she had been drawing further from him. “I daresay you have been here a good while, though the time has seemed short to me. I will let you go now.” And then he loosed her hand slowly and lingeringly. “There,—go, dear. Only come back to me again. Not to stay, you know—I don’t ask you to stay—only let me see your face as often as you can.”

He had left her free, and after a moment she rose up. Perhaps he had thought, or hoped, that she would not accept her freedom; but she did accept it. She was oppressed, and she wanted relief from her oppression; she was burdened by the weight

of the love he gave her, and she wanted to escape from her burden.

She rose up and stood for a moment looking at him.

"You know I will come whenever you want me," she said in a low voice. "I shall always be at hand. Shall I send some one now? Shall I ring the bell?"

"Yes; ring," he said.

She rang the bell and waited. Perhaps she wanted to say something more before she went—something that should be kinder; but she could think of nothing. He had turned his head away a little, and half closed his eyes. Suddenly, with a strange, sad, restless feeling of self-reproach, she laid her hand on his again.

"My darling!" he said softly.

Something that was almost like a touch of colour came to his cheek. Then the door opened to admit the nurse, and

without another word she turned away.

She went downstairs, and found her way to the library, and sat down there, and began to cry like a child. She was sorry for, and yet at the same time angry with, him; she was sorry for, and yet at the same time angry with, herself. "I never felt so hard; I did not think I could have been so hard," she said; but even as she said this she was sobbing, and her cheeks were wet with tears.

Ah, if it were but that day again when she had been in this house last—that happy Summer day, when she and her father and Mr. Faulkner had rambled through the rooms together, and she had possessed what she had lost since, and had been ignorant of all that she had since known! If it were but that day!

She sat, after a time, looking wearily and listlessly around her. The dark old room,



with its fireless grate, and its black, massive book-cases, looked dreary enough on this dull Winter afternoon. She began to think to herself how, if she had married Mr. Faulkner when he was well, she should have come to be mistress here; and the thought made her shiver. She pictured herself living in this great house with Mr. Faulkner—he its master, she its mistress; his companionship the companionship to which she should rise day after day for all the remaining days of her life; and as she tried to imagine this, she turned sick and cold. Better to be dead than to marry Mr. Faulkner—better, a thousand times, to be dead! And yet, even at this very moment while she sat here—at this very moment while she was thinking these things,—she was under a promise to marry him!

“Oh, he has been ungenerous to me! He is not so good as I have thought him!”

the girl cried bitterly to herself. "He cares nothing for what I feel, so that he may secure a momentary gratification to himself. He has had no right to wring this promise from me, and I—I have been a fool to give it, I think."

But yet she had given it, and now, when he was dying, how could she draw back?

The daylight was fading away, but she sat on in the darkening room, because she did not know where else to go. She had sat there for a long time, when the door at last opened, and some one stood on the threshold, looking into the room. She rose up then, and at the sound of her movement the new-comer advanced. She was a young, slight woman; in the dusk Anne could just see so much. She came up to Anne, and put out her hand.

"I was looking for you: my husband thought that you might be here," she said.

"Won't you come to the breakfast-room, where there is a fire?—or to your own room? There is a room ready for you upstairs."

"I think I should like to go upstairs for a little while," Anne answered. And the next moment, with a little hesitation, she asked—"Are you Mrs. Travers?"

"Yes," the other said.

They left the library together.

"I will come up with you and show you where to go," her companion said to her; and so she took her upstairs to a bed-room in which a fire was burning cheerfully. "You have got quite chilled in that cold library," she said then, standing for a moment by Anne's side, and looking at her.

"Yes, it was very foolish of me."

"I ought to have come sooner to look after you—but we thought you were still with Mr. Faulkner."

"I left Mr. Faulkner an hour ago."

"And you have been alone ever since?"

The tone was kind, but Anne did not respond to it; she was too listless and weary.

"Oh, yes, I will come down—I will come very soon," she said, in answer to a question that Mrs. Travers asked, in a tired way, as if she wanted to be alone again; and then her companion left her, and, with an effort, she roused herself to wash her face and brush her hair.

"I wish I had not to talk to anyone," she thought to herself presently, as she went downstairs again; but when she entered the breakfast-room there was something in the quiet courtesy and kindness which met her there that almost unconsciously soothed and comforted her. Anne Warwick was not a woman who almost at any time cared to be openly sympathized

with ; if she was in trouble, she liked to hide her trouble ; if she was moved, she let as few eyes as she could see her emotion. If Mr. or Mrs. Travers had approached her at this time with any marked look or tone of pity for her, consciously or unconsciously she would have shrunk from it, and would have closed her heart against them ; but they did not do this ; they were so natural and simple that they made her feel at home with them ; they disarmed her so entirely, by assuming nothing, that her reserve and pride never rose up, as under other circumstances they might have done, in self-defence.

They had begun by speaking about mere ordinary trifles during the first moments after she joined them, but very soon they drifted quietly into a long grave talk about Mr. Faulkner, and all the incidents connected with his accident. Mr. Travers had

learnt far more particulars of it than she yet knew, and he told all that he had heard to her, simply and naturally, with no affectation of supposing that the details he gave her could either be uninteresting to her, or would affect her more than she could bear. He talked to her of Mr. Faulkner as if he were her friend, but not as if he were her lover, or as though his death were to be a heart-break to her. Mr. Faulkner was the friend of all of them, and as the friends of a man who was dying would naturally talk together, so they talked of him, gravely and tenderly, till gradually—for this moment, at least—the bitterness against him died out of Anne's heart.

Was it not true, as they had said, that no kinder man had ever lived—none who was truer, who was more to be trusted? “It is hard to wish that he had left that poor little lame child to her fate,” Mr. Travers

said, "and yet her life seems such a small thing to be bought with a life like his. One almost feels as if one would be more reconciled to it if he had died in doing some greater thing; and yet no greater thing could really have been finer than what he did do. Indeed, if he had lost his life in saving some other that would to the world have seemed better worth saving, the act in reality would not have been more, but less heroic than it was. The waste of the sacrifice is part of the nobleness of it."

"Yes," Anne softly said.

The tears had risen to her eyes—tears that were kinder than any she had shed since she had entered the house.

"He was just the kind of man one could always have been sure would do such a thing as this, if he was placed in circumstances to call for it," Mrs. Travers said presently. "He was always so tender-heart-

ed. Do you remember, Frank, that little lost boy that he wandered one day half over London with? and the girl he found one night crying in the street? What trouble he gave himself about them both! How good he has always been to Ruth and Harry! When he comes to stay with us, Miss Warwick, our children always take possession of him. They make him take part in all their games—they bring all their small troubles to him. My little Ruthie burst out crying when we told her he was ill. She asked me if she should never see him again—and I could not bear to tell the truth to her. Oh, I can't bear to think it myself! When one remembers all he is—all he might be—it seems terrible."

Mrs. Travers gave a sob, and Anne set her lips tight, lest she should sob too. But her lips quivered in spite of her, and the sob rose, though she crushed it down.



When the dinner-bell rang, and they rose to leave the room, Anne put her hand into her new friend's arm.

"I am glad you are here," she said simply.

"My dear, I am glad too—I am very glad," Mrs. Travers cordially replied.

"And indeed, Frank," she said to her husband that night before they went to bed, "I don't wonder at anything, now that I have seen her. I think if I were a man I could break my heart for that girl."

"Then it is a very good thing that you are *not* a man, my dear," Mr. Travers answered drily.

"I think I am half in love with her even as it is. I can't keep my eyes off her."

"So I have been noticing all night."

"It is not that she is really handsomer than many other girls, but she is such a gracious sort of creature—there is such a

curious charm about her. Don't you feel it, Frank?"

"Well, my dear, it would be hardly desirable that I *should* feel it perhaps—at any rate in the same degree that you seem to do," Mr. Travers answered; and then his wife laughed.

She had put up her face to Anne's half an hour ago, and kissed her as she bade her good night. She was a thorough woman, and as she had sat during the evening looking at her she had caught herself more than once pondering how Anne would look in her widow's weeds—whether she would really put on a widow's cap, and how the beautiful young face would bear that sad framing. We speculate about such strange, poor things sometimes in the very presence of death. "I don't much think that any one will expect her to wear widow's mourning—do you, Frank?" Mrs. Travers said to her husband before she fell asleep.

## CHAPTER X.

ANNE had seen Mr. Faulkner a second time on the evening of her first day at Sutton, but she had only gone to his room to say good night to him.

"Shall I go or not?" she had said to Mrs. Travers when they returned from the dining-room, asking her question with her grey eyes looking wistfully and doubtfully into the other's face.

"Yes, go, of course—why should you not? You know he would like it," Mrs. Travers answered at once; and then Anne went. She would rather not have gone—

she knew it was her pity for him, and not her affection, that sent her. She went unwillingly, and hesitated as she stood at his door, with an instinctive reluctance to cross its threshold.

The nurse came when she knocked, and let her in. "Don't go," she said quickly to the woman. "I shall only stay a minute." And then she went up to the bed. Mr. Faulkner was lying awake. "They told me they thought I might come to wish you good night," she said timidly.

"I had been wondering if you would come. Thank you. It is very kind of you," he said.

"Have you been asleep?" she asked.

"Oh yes—I sleep a good deal."

"And—you are not in pain?"

"No."

And then she did not know what more to ask or say, and stood silent.

"Tell me what you have been doing?" he said after a little pause.

"We have been sitting together—Mr. and Mrs. Travers and I—talking for the most part."

"I am glad that Mrs. Travers is here. It makes it better for you."

"Yes—I am very glad."

"You must take care that they make you comfortable. Have they given you a proper room?"

"Oh yes—oh, they will do everything right. Don't think about me."

"Don't think about you!" he repeated. He said the words half aloud, with a curious smile coming across his lips. "That is the second time you have said that."

She made no answer to him; the colour only came to her face. They were both silent for a few moments, and then at the

end of those few moments she bade him good-bye.

"I shall see you again in the morning. I—I hope you will have an easy night," she said hesitatingly.

"I daresay I shall. Thank you, my dearest," he replied.

Her firm warm hand touched his for a moment, and then she left him. Her duty was ended for this night. She turned away with a sense of relief, and yet with a sense of self-reproach too that kept her heart heavy.

"If he only did not care about it so much—if he did not expect so much from me—I should be able to give him more," she thought to herself. "How can I be so hard to him? I must be very wicked to be so hard."

And yet she could not soften her heart, or make the thought anything but a thought

which brought relief with it, that for twelve hours she should not see his face again.

Dr. Russell and another surgeon had been with their patient shortly before this second visit of Anne's.

"There is no material change in him," they said when they came out of the sick-room. "The pulse is a little weaker ; that is all."

This was their report to-night ; it was also, almost unchanged, the report they delivered again next morning.

"Do you think everything is being done that is possible ?" Mr. Travers asked them. "Do not hesitate for a moment if you would like to consult with anyone else."

But they looked at one another, and shook their heads.

"Of course if you wish for your own satisfaction to send for more advice we will do so at once," the man from London said ;

"but I am afraid you would find it useless. It is unhappily one of those sad cases where doctors can do little. We can watch carefully from hour to hour, as my friend Dr. Russell is doing here, but beyond that——"

"And are they really doing nothing?" Anne exclaimed quickly when this was told her. "Do they just mean to watch, and see him getting worse, until——"

"Yes, I suspect that is what they mean," Mr. Travers answered gravely. "As far as I understand what Russell tells me, he expects the paralysis to spread up the spinal cord, and I imagine if that is the course it takes they have no power to stop it—and it can only end one way."

"But it seems so terrible to do nothing but wait and see him die!"

She spoke with a break in her voice. Mrs. Travers put her hand on her shoulder, and the two women turned away together.



“Do you think it is not hard for me because I don’t care for him?” Anne cried suddenly and almost passionately, looking up into the other’s face. “Why, sometimes that seems to make it only the bitterer—only the crueler. If I loved him more—if I could go and be with him now, and feel that it gave me life to cling to him and be near him—do you not think that that would comfort me? But oh, Mrs. Travers,” cried the girl, quivering, “I don’t want to be with him! That is the dreadful part of it. I can’t love him; and when I go to him (as I shall have to go now—in another minute or two), it fills me with a kind of horror—a horror of him and of myself—to feel that he wants me to give him something that I cannot give.—And yet I have promised to marry him!” She said this with a sudden fall in her voice, so that Mrs. Travers could hardly hear the words, and with a sudden irrepressible shudder.

"My dear, don't think of that—that will be a mere form at the last," Mrs. Travers said.

"Why do you call it a mere form?" and she blazed up again, with the hot blood coming to her face. "It will be a form to *him*—but will it only be a form to me when I shall have to call myself by his name afterwards, and to remember every time I think of him (and what shall I ever do but think of him?) that he was my husband? Oh, Mrs. Travers, it is cruel of him to make me do this thing. He may call it, as you do, a mere form, but it is not a form—it is not a form. It is a bitter reality, and a bitter degradation."

"I don't understand why you should feel in this way," Mrs. Travers said. But she began to speak uneasily, and she said to her husband presently, "Frank, I don't know how we are to let this thing be done,

if she takes it to heart so keenly. I do think, for my own part, that it would be better to give it up. Or, at any rate, it would be better for her to be told the truth about it, for I can't bear to see her flushing up in this way, and talking so unjustly of him."

"Well, it is a pity, I think, too; but Faulkner says it won't do to tell her the truth."

"I believe he is wrong."

"I daresay he is; but how can one convince him of that?"

"I am very sure if he told it to her she would feel more tenderly to him."

"Very likely; only that would scarcely console him, if, at the same time, she drew back from her promise."

"But would she draw back from it? I don't see why she should."

"He thinks differently, you see."

"But he may be wrong."

"Yes, my dear, and *we* may be wrong. Considering that you never saw her till yesterday, he ought to know Miss Warwick a little better than you do."

"He ought—yes, but does he?" said Mrs. Travers. "It is my opinion that, in most respects, he knows as much about her as she does about him, and that is wonderfully little. When two people are in love with one another——"

"But in this case, my dear, two people are *not* in love with one another."

"Well, Frank, one person is in love, at any rate, and that fact makes him as blind as a mole. Do you know,—I think, if I were Mr. Faulkner, I could manage Anne Warwick better than he is doing."

"Poor Faulkner!"

"Yes, it is hard for him, is it not? Oh, I am so sorry for him! You should have

seen the light on his face just now, when I went in with her to his room, and he turned round and saw her. And she—if she saw him lying dead she would be glad!”

It was a strong thing to say, and yet perhaps it was scarcely an untrue thing, for Anne's position was altogether a strange and unnatural one. She did not love Mr. Faulkner, and yet circumstances had placed her in such a relation to him that he could almost claim care and tenderness from her as a right: he was in one sense nothing to her, and yet, because of her promise to him, when he called her she had to go to him; when his hand asked for hers she had to let him take it; when he used terms of endearment to her she had to suffer them; and all this was so terrible to her, that how could she help secretly thinking of the time when she should escape once more from it?

She knew that he was forbearing to her;

she knew that if he had chosen he could have claimed more from her than he did. He rarely, as the days went on, asked her for any service; he never complained that she stayed too short a time with him; he never reproached her for her coldness. She would often come to him for a few minutes, and then make some excuse for going away, and whatever the excuse was he always accepted it. Sometimes his gentleness used to touch her with remorse, and though she had told him that she was going she would not have the heart to go, but would linger with a sort of forlorn pity—a sorrowful, hopeless pity both for herself and him.

At times, when he used to thank her for coming to him, the tears would rise to her eyes. "Why do you thank me? I never do anything for you. You make me helpless, when you give me so much, and I can give you back nothing," she cried one day,

with a sudden pain and emotion that she could not control.

"You are always troubled about not giving me something back," he answered her when she said this. "Why do you think about it? If *I* am content, cannot *you* be satisfied too?"

And then she did not answer him. A momentary remorseful feeling had made her speak; but these momentary remorsees often passed over her, and left her heart still hard to him.

His weakness was so great that she was spared the pain of being ever required to talk to him much. That at least was a relief to her. She sometimes sat by his side almost in complete silence. Once he had asked her to read to him, and she had read for a few minutes, but he could not bear it. One day he said he should like to hear her sing. "Oh, no," she exclaimed quickly,

"I could not do it." But she was sorry after she had said that she would not do it, and after a few moments she turned to him again, and, "Would you really like me to sing?" she asked him.

He answered, "You used to sing a little childish song long ago about a swallow. Sing that, if you can remember it."

She sang the song without another word. She sang it tremulously and softly, as she might have done if she had been hushing a child to sleep.

After that she sang to him a good many times—always in the same low murmuring way. Sometimes there would come a jar in her voice. One day, in the middle of a hymn that she was singing she broke suddenly down. "My kind love!" he said tenderly when she did that. "My kind love!" he said again, and laid his hand on hers.



She never knew until long afterwards how eagerly during these days he occupied himself, and spent the little strength he had, in making all the arrangements that were in his power to secure her independence after his death. He sent for his lawyer, and made his will, leaving the whole of his personal property to her. He calculated with Mr. Travers the income she would be possessed of, going over the items of it with an interest that was almost painful.

“For God’s sake, Travers, make it secure to her!” he would say to his friend again and again. “I can’t trust myself—my head is too weak; but, Travers, see that it is all right—make it sure, so that there can be no dispute about it.”

He had the will drawn up, and kept in his room, ready to be signed as soon as his marriage with Anne should have taken place; and he had another will, in which he did

not, as in the first, call her his wife, but simply designated her by her maiden name, not only drawn up, but signed and witnessed, lest by any accident or miscalculation the end should come suddenly, before the marriage was accomplished. "Even if she should have no more than the little I can leave her in this way, it will at least be enough to secure her from actual want," he said to Mr. Travers, with a look of intense relief in his face, when this was done.

"Anne, are you not going to come home?" Miss Carstairs said one day to her cousin. "He may linger for weeks yet—how can you tell? It seems such a strange thing for you to stay here."

"Don't you think it would be strange just now wherever I stayed?" Anne answered, wearily, to this speech.

"But, dear, you can't think how it makes people talk."

"What does it matter how they talk?"

"Oh, Anne, it does matter! You can't fly in the face of the world in that way. Think what everybody is sure to say!"

"You had better tell me what everybody is sure to say, for I neither know nor care."

"You *must* care, Anne; you ought to care. They will say that you came here of your own accord, because—because you were in love with him."

"I can't help it if they do say that. I only wish it was true."

"You don't wish it was true that you had come here without being asked?"

"Lucy, what is it you want me to do? If people are shocked at my having come to him, they would not be a bit less shocked though I should repent now, and go back again. My uncle is angry because I am

here, I suppose? Well, I am sorry he is angry, but it is too late to help it now. And as for anybody else, what does it matter?"

"I don't think you ought to talk in that way."

"No, I suppose you don't."

"I think it is everybody's business to—to pay some regard to people's opinions."

"Is it? That is a bad outlook for me, then."

"One can't act in defiance of the world; and, Anne, I do think everybody will feel that this marriage—if it really should come to a marriage—is such a *very* odd thing."

"Well, you wouldn't blame them for that, would you?"

"Blame *them*? No, I shouldn't blame them."

"Do you want to blame me, then? Lucy, what is it you want?" Miss Warwick had

paused for a moment, and then the colour had begun to come into her face. "Do you think *I* wish to marry Mr. Faulkner? You know I do not. But if you suppose you can make me draw back from my promise to marry him out of fear of what ill-natured tongues may say of me, then I only tell you that you might have known me better than to believe I could be so false to him, and so false and such a coward to myself!"

She had spoken wearily and listlessly enough during the earlier part of their talk together; but these last words had flashed from her with all the old ring in her voice, and all the old light in her eyes.

"It never does any good to argue with you," Miss Carstairs only said plaintively after a little silence. "I know I may say what I like, and it won't move you, or make you alter your intention."

"Then why do you come and scold me,

and make it all harder for me?" Anne asked sadly. "Lucy, do you not think I am troubled enough just now? Do you not think that the troubles I can't escape from are cruel enough? I am so weary,—I am so shaken. If you can't help me (and that you can't do—no one can) won't you at least be kind to me, and leave me alone?"

She went to her cousin, and laid her cheek on hers, and kissed her. "I can't draw back, Lucy. I don't know whether I am doing right or not. I may be all wrong perhaps—I am not going to defend myself; only, right or wrong, he is dying, and he trusts me, and I can't leave him now."

And then Miss Carstairs said nothing more, but ended her visit presently, and drove back to the Hall alone.

"Do *you* think I am doing such a wild, Quixotic thing?" Anne said wistfully to Mrs. Travers later in the same day. "My cousin

says that I am. I am shocking everybody, she says. But do *you* condemn me? Would *you* have refused to come to him if he had asked you?" And the girl looked rather piteously in her friend's face, for we may profess contempt for the talk of ill-natured tongues, but ill-natured tongues, however contemptible they may be, have still a sting in them.

Perhaps her question was rather a hard one to answer. Mrs. Travers, I am afraid, was a little taken aback by it.

"A thing need not be wrong, my dear, because it is Quixotic," she said, after a moment. "Of course people will always differ in their judgments. For my own part I think you are acting very generously and bravely."

"Will you stand by me, then?"

"Stand by you? Why, of course I will stand by you, if there should be any need for

standing. It does not *seem* much as if I were disapproving of you, does it?" Mrs. Travers said cheerfully, and looked at the girl with her frank, kind eyes.

And then Anne let herself be comforted a little. "Though no doubt Miss Carstairs spoke no more than the truth," Mrs. Travers said presently to her husband rather gravely, "for you may be sure at this moment the whole parish is in a state of ferment about this business. I am terribly sorry for Anne, for she is not to blame; and yet I allow the thing does look odd."

"Oh, it doesn't matter how it looks," said Mr. Travers lightly, with a man's scorn for appearances. "Don't, for heaven's sake, let her begin to trouble herself about that."

"*She* won't trouble herself much about it, I think; but I am a good deal troubled about it for her. These country people are such terrible gossips. I think, Frank, when



—when it is all over, I should like to ask her to come back to town with us.”

“Yes, of course you would. You have fallen in love with her, so you will want to take her wherever you go.”

“But you don’t object to it?”

“Oh no, I don’t object to it. I should think it would be rather a good thing to get her away from here.”

“I am sure it would. She ought to have an entire change of scene. Indeed I don’t know why she should return here at all—to live, I mean. She will have nothing left to tie her to the place.”

“Where else do you want her to live, then? With us?”

“I don’t say that.”

“No—you only mean it, I suppose? My dear, at two-and-thirty you ought to have more wisdom than to let your head get turned by a pretty face.”

"At two-and-thirty, Frank, one is just as likely to have one's head turned as at two-and-twenty—and I have to learn yet when the age of wisdom begins."

And then Mr. Travers laughed, and the subject dropped.

You see she was beautiful in other people's eyes besides Mr. Faulkner's. She was one of the women who may make enemies, but who also—and perhaps beyond their deserts—make passionate and devoted friends. She won Mrs. Travers's heart during these days, though she made little effort to do it. One night Mrs. Travers sat by Mr. Faulkner's bedside, and talked to him about her till the dying man's eyes brightened at her praise, and then grew dim with tears.

"God bless you! You understand her. Be good to her when I am gone," he said.

"Yes, I will—I will," she answered.  
"And I am glad that she will have your

name," this impulsive woman said ; " I am glad it will always seem as if she had belonged to you. We never can forget you—no, none of us will ever do that."

Anne had been in the room with them a little while before. She had been standing by Mrs. Travers's chair; Mrs. Travers had wanted to resign her seat to her, but Anne would not let her resign it. " I have only come for a minute; don't move; I am going away," she said. But yet she had stayed for a good while. She often lingered in the room when Mrs. Travers was there, to make her presence a shelter to her. She was in a state such as you may easily understand, in which, though she found it hard to be with Mr. Faulkner, yet she found it harder still to stay away from him; for when she was away from him her conscience would not let her rest. Perhaps she owed no duty to him—it might have been so—she could no

tell—but always if she was long away from him a feeling of dissatisfaction and self-reproach began to torture her, and drive her back. He wanted her; he might have no right to claim her, perhaps, but go where she might, do what she would, it seemed to her as if he was calling her to come back again. One evening, when she was sitting where the light fell on her, he told her that her face was growing thin.

“Am I vexing you so with all this?” he said tenderly. “Ah, my dear, I would end it sooner if I could.”

“Why do you speak like that?” she answered hastily. “If it is hard now, do you think that presently——”

And then she could not finish her sentence. Instead of finishing it she suddenly went down on her knees, and hid her face upon his bed.

He had been ill for a week, when one

morning he said to Mr. Travers—"Frank, has not the end nearly come?"

"What makes you say that?" Mr. Travers asked.

"Feel my pulse; there is not much left of it—is there?"

"Do you feel weaker this morning?" his friend asked. He had felt the pulse, or, at least, had tried to feel it, but he could hardly detect its faint, fluttering beats.

"Well, if it was possible to feel weaker, I might say I did. I feel as if it couldn't go on much longer. Ask Russell presently when he comes. Be sure you ask him. Remember what depends upon it. And, Travers, if he should say that the time has come, you will have to do something at once, you know. Recollect—the last grains from the hour-glass slip out very fast."

"Yes, yes."

"Whenever you send a messenger he will

take nearly an hour to get to the Vicarage, and Mr. Burton may be out of the way when you want him, unless he is warned. *She* ought to have a little notice too. Don't forget all that."

"I won't forget anything. Keep yourself calm."

"You have got the license and the will both together, have you not? That is right. Keep them together till they are wanted. I must leave it all to you, Travers. I can do nothing; only, for God's sake, take care that you are in time!"

He said nothing more, but turned his head away. It was about an hour afterwards when the doctors came. They spoke little in his presence, and he asked them no questions, but as they were leaving the room he made a sign to Mr. Travers.

"Find out the truth from them, and then come back to me," he said.

He lay and waited quietly till Mr. Travers returned. When his friend came back he looked in his face eagerly.

“Was I right?” he said.

There was a moment’s silence, and then—  
“Yes, they are afraid——” Mr. Travers began.

“I was sure of it. Now, will you let Mr. Burton know?”

“Had you not better first see Miss Warwick?”

“First, do you think? Well, whatever you like. Yes, I daresay you are right. Go and ask her; tell her I want to speak to her, if she will come. They say it should be done at once—don’t they?”

“They think—if it is to be done at all——

“Yes, yes, that will do. Then go to her, Frank. Ah, there she is!” for at that moment a knock came to the door.

Mr. Travers went and opened it.

"I was just coming for you," he said to Anne. "Mr. Faulkner wants to see you."

He would have liked, if it had been possible, to speak a word to her before he admitted her, to prepare her for what was coming; but it was not possible. She went quietly past him, and he left the room. "Poor thing!" he said to himself, as he went out. She had looked so unconscious as she passed him—so unexpectant of what she was about to hear.

It was a mild Winter day, one of those sunny sweet Winter mornings that often come in February, bringing with them a delusive "dream of Spring." The light was slanting across his bed as she sat down beside it: it fell upon her dress and touched her hair as he talked to her. In after-days she remembered it all.

They spoke a few words, and then she





sat down. She said, after a few moments—

“The doctors were here just now, were they not? Did they say anything?”

She asked the question, not because she supposed they had said anything, but only to break the silence, for she was often embarrassed when she was with him, and there were often long silences between them.

“No, they said nothing,” he answered. “They said nothing to *me*,” he repeated, quietly, after a moment or two, “but they told Travers what I have been expecting to hear. You know what I mean, do you not? My darling, can you make up your mind to fulfil your promise to-day?”

“To-day!” she echoed.

She did not say the word aloud, but in a kind of shivering whisper. And then—  
“Oh, not to-day!” she exclaimed hurriedly.

He made no answer. The shudder in her voice must have been a hard thing for him

to hear. She put her hands for a few moments over her face ; in that pause she recovered herself, but there was an eager tremulousness in her tone as she spoke again.

“ Will you not spare me ? ” she said. “ I gave you my promise—I know that, and I will keep it if you say I must,—but will you not be generous and spare me? What good could it do you now for me to become your wife ? ”

“ It would make me die in peace,” he said.

“ But I am with you already. I cannot be nearer to you than this.”

“ Anne, you do not know.”

“ I do know. I am in health, and you are not. You have set your heart on this thing, and it is only a sick man’s fancy.”

“ Then, for once, humour a sick man’s fancy. Dear, you do not understand me. You think I am very cruel to you. Will you not trust me—in this last thing ? ”

"Trust you !" she repeated mechanically.

It was true ; she did not understand him ; but she did not believe him either. He asked her to trust him, and she did not trust him. She sat clasping her hands together. The colour was in her face ; a great wave of indignation seemed to rise up and choke her.

But she had at least enough self-command, or enough pity for him, to be silent. For a minute she did not speak. She had made one appeal to him, and it had failed. At the minute's end she only said in a low voice—

"You have my promise. I will do what you wish."

And then there was another pause before he said, in a tone where sadness perhaps touched her even then—

"I know what you are thinking. You think I am asking a sacrifice from you that

no man with any generosity in him ought to ask. Well, it is hard ; but since you believe that (and, dear, I do not blame you) I must bear it. Only I thought you might have trusted me a little more, and delayed your judgment until you understood—— But it is no use—I have no strength left——”

The broken sentence all at once died away, and he turned his face from her ; and at last in the silence that followed her heart melted, and, impulsive and passionate as she always was, great tears of pity and self-reproach sprang to her eyes.

“Forgive me ! It is I who am ungenerous. I *will* trust you—I *will* trust you !” she said. There were sobs in her voice as she leant over him. “I am ready whenever you like. Don’t think I have forgotten all your goodness to me—don’t think I have forgotten it !”

She took his hand in hers; after a moment or two she laid her cheek upon the wasted fingers.

"Well, you will not be sorry for this presently," he said. "I don't think you will be sorry when I am gone. If you had refused me perhaps you might have reproached yourself afterwards."

"Yes," she answered in a low voice. She knew he was right. She knew that if he had released her from her promise, and had died yearning for the thing that she had refused to give him, she should never find peace and forgiveness any more. "Yes," she said quickly—"I am satisfied." And then again—"I am quite ready now."

"Then go, my dearest,—go to Mr. Travers, and he will tell you what to do. He will arrange it all."

She found Mrs. Travers in the passage outside his room, and her friend, without

speaking, put her arms round the girl's neck and kissed her.

"Don't kiss me—don't be kind to me just now," Anne said quickly.

She withdrew herself from the other's embrace, and they went to the breakfast-room together. Mr. Travers was there, and Anne spoke at once to him.

"He says that you will tell me what to do. I am quite ready now—we are both ready," she said.

"I was waiting to see you before I sent word to Mr. Burton."

"Well, you can send now."

He looked at her, and said nothing more. He wrote his note, and sent a messenger with it to the Vicarage. As he was going out of the room after this was done, Anne, who had been standing quite still by the mantelpiece, suddenly stopped him.

"What did the doctors say? I have not heard," she said:

"They said they were afraid that he would hardly live through the day."

"That was all?"

"That was all,—except that I spoke to them about your marriage. I asked them if it was necessary for it to take place at once (you know I was bound to do this), and they said they feared it was, unless it could be given up altogether."

"Thank you. That is all I wanted to know."

She went to a chair and sat down, and did not speak again. After a little while she merely said to Mrs. Travers, who was still in the room—

"It does not matter about my dress, does it? This black gown—this will do?" And when Mrs. Travers answered "Yes," she made no farther reply.

She sat for a long time without moving, looking before her into the fire. Mrs. Travers went away and came back again, and found her still in the same attitude. She never moved until, when nearly an hour had passed, Mr. Travers returned into the room. She half rose from her chair then, and looked at him with a startled face.

"Has he come?" she asked hurriedly.

"Mr. Burton? No—he could hardly be here yet."

"Oh, I wish he would come!" she cried tremulously.

She rose up and went to the window; presently, without saying anything more, she left the room, and they saw her walking up and down one of the garden paths.

"That is about the best thing she could do," Mr. Travers said as he looked at her.

"Well, upon the whole, she is a sensible girl."



"Frank, I wish it was all over!" his wife exclaimed. "It frightens me now it has come so near. She is so quiet—do you think she quite faces it all?—the possibility, I mean—for of course there *must* be a possibility——"

"I hardly think there is. Russell says he is sinking fast. Besides, you can see it in his face."

"Well, I suppose Dr. Russell must know—only, think what extraordinary cases of recovery one sometimes hears of! There was Elizabeth Hutton's, you remember."

"That was a very singular case certainly."

"You know they said it was impossible she could live. They were standing round her bed, waiting for the last breath—and yet she did live. And there was Mr. White—think of what the doctors said of him. Now that was a case not at all unlike Mr. Faulkner's."

"God forbid poor Faulkner should live to drag on a miserable existence like John White's!"

"Well—God forbid it, indeed!—but still, suppose he should? Imagine his living, bed-ridden, for perhaps twenty years—and Anne Warwick married to him!"

"My dear Carry, what would you propose to do?"

"I don't propose anything; I only say I am frightened."

"Will you go and look at him yourself, and see what you think?"

"I saw him half an hour ago; besides, what is *my* opinion worth? You know, Frank, I don't mean that I really doubt he is dying; only one can't help thinking of possibilities, and, if you think of them at all, you *must* be uneasy."

"It is an embarrassing business, no doubt,

but I don't know that the responsibility really rests on us."

"I don't know that it does, but yet there seems nobody else for it to rest on. Frank, do you know, I think I should be easier in my mind afterwards, if we said just one other word to her—to make it sure that she understands——"

"Well, my dear, whom do you want to say it?"

"I will say it, if you like."

"Then you must do it at once."

"Yes—I know. I will go now. You don't think I am wrong, dear?"

"No, I don't think you are wrong. Of course she ought fully to understand."

And then Mrs. Travers put on a shawl, and went out and joined Anne where she was still walking up and down the path.

The girl looked quickly up as Mrs. Travers came near.

"Am I to come in?" she said at once.

"No, my dear—not yet. No; I have only come to be with you for a few minutes." And then Mrs. Travers put her hand within Anne's arm. "I have come because I want to say half a dozen last words to you——"

"Need you do that?" Anne interrupted, quickly.

"I think I need, dear. You see we are both of us—both Mr. Travers and I—to some extent responsible for this marriage——"

"I don't see that."

"But *we* can't help seeing it, dear child—and there is just one point—. I will speak plainly at once. Have you ever thought that it is possible—barely possible, I know, but still, no one can say that it cannot be—that Mr. Faulkner may not die?"

She thought that her question would

startle Anne, but it did not startle her. The girl's lip trembled a little, but that was the only sign of emotion that she showed. She merely answered, in a low voice :

“Did you suppose I could forget to think of that?”

“Then are you really satisfied to let the marriage take place—in spite of that chance?”

“What can I do?” she said—she stood still and looked into the other's face, with a wild, pathetic, pleading look in her eyes—“what can I do? I have asked him to release me, and he will not do it; and now I have given him my promise again, and I cannot draw back, whatever the cost may be. You do not think I can—do you? Only—you are not deceiving me—are you?”—her voice quickened as she said this—“you are not telling me he is dying when you think that he may live?”

"Could you believe that we would do that?"

"No—forgive me—I do not believe it. I ought not to have said that. You only want to warn me—is not that it?—so that I may not do anything blindly. Yes, I understand. You have been so kind to me all this time."

"Oh, my dear, I feel for you—I am sorry for you!"

"Yes, I know; and, of course, when I do this, I take the risk. That is inevitable. And I am a coward, and so I am frightened. But I ought not to be frightened—ought I? He has no doubt himself."

"No; he has never had any doubt from the first."

"Then I will have none either. I have made up my mind, and I am not going to look back. And—I think it does me good

to go on walking here. Will you let me stay till Mr. Burton comes?"

"Surely, my dear. No one shall disturb you again."

And then Mrs. Travers went back into the house, and told her husband what Anne had said.

"And now we can do no more. We have discharged our consciences," she said.

Within an hour from this time Mr. Travers went to his friend's bedside, and told him that the clergyman had come. They had already made the few simple preparations that were required. A table close to the bed had been covered with a white cloth, and a prayer-book placed upon it: the bed had been set smooth, and all the common paraphernalia of the sick-room moved away.

"Are you ready for us to come in at once?" Mr. Travers asked.

"Quite ready," Mr. Faulkner said quickly.

He was lying on his back, as he had lain throughout his illness, with his head merely resting on its usual pillow. "Don't make any attempt to raise him," the doctor had said. "He is too weak to bear it." So they had made no such attempt, but had left him undisturbed.

The little procession came in silence into the room, and almost without a word being spoken by anyone the clergyman took up his book, and began to read the service. In ten minutes it was over. She was as calm as he was, to the end, and almost as pale. Mrs. Travers, who had stood watching them both, said, when it was over,

"He hardly took his eyes off her face, and she never looked at him once. "Oh, Frank, I hope I shall never take part in such a strange, painful thing again! And yet how beautiful they both looked!" she exclaimed, the next moment. "To see him as he lay



there, with that expression in his eyes, is enough to make one in love with death."

But Anne, as she said, had never turned her face to him. She had repeated the words she had to say in a low, unbroken voice: she had not trembled, though her hand was as cold as stone, even when he had put the ring upon her finger, and Mr. Burton, in his grave voice, had pronounced them to be man and wife. The only sign of feeling she had shown was a sudden pitiful, appealing look that she had turned on Mr. Travers when the service was finished. "What am I to do next?" it seemed to say helplessly to him. "Have mercy on me, and tell me what to do."

But he could not tell her what to do. He had moved back a little from the bed: they had all moved back, and had left her standing there alone. He could not answer her appeal. With one accord, and in silence,

they turned one by one slowly away, and left the room.

It was only then, when they were all gone, that she raised her eyes for the first time, and she and Mr. Faulkner looked at one another. It was a strange, sad, long look,—perhaps, on her side, a cold, half hard look at first, but after a few moments her eyes softened, and her lips began to quiver. Perhaps, unhappy as she was, some sudden great pity for him made her for a moment forget herself, so that all at once, with a sob, she went on her knees beside him, and laid her face down on his pillow.

## CHAPTER XI.

“**H**E is asleep,” the nurse said, with her finger on her lip.

“My dear, he is asleep,” Mrs. Travers repeated to Anne. “I wish you would lie down now, and try to sleep too.”

But Anne only shook her head. She did not want to sleep—she did not want to rest. She had left the sick-room for a little while, because the lawyer had come, and they had told her to leave it; but Mrs. Travers had found her wandering aimlessly about the house when she came to tell her that he had fallen asleep, and an anxious, feverish

look was on her face as she refused Mrs. Travers's request.

"If he is asleep, I will go and sit with him. What else have I to do?" she said, in a nervous, pitiful way.

So they let her go back, and she went silently into the room, and took up her place again at his bedside.

She sat still there, without doing anything. She had hardly as yet begun to think, or to realise what had happened. She looked sometimes at the ring on her finger, but almost with a blank expression in her eyes. She turned it round—she once half drew it off. Ah! was she dreaming, or had she really stood here an hour ago—stood passively here, and let them make her his wife?

She moved the curtain back presently, and with a curious fear and shrinking in her face, began to look at him. How quietly

he slept! She could not hear his breathing—she could scarcely even feel it, though she bent near to him. Would he, perhaps, she began to think—would he possibly pass away like this without awakening?

She trembled when she first thought that it might be so, but presently the thought grew unconsciously into a half-acknowledged wish. “It would be so peaceful—what better could we ask for him? If death could come this way, quietly, without any pain——”

“Am I very hard to think of it?” she asked herself, in a little while. “Am I very hard because I can sit here and speculate about his death? Ah, I may be hard, but what should I do if he did not die? It would be too terrible! And yet to think that I cannot any longer pray God to save him—that in my heart I am praying God to let him die soon!”

She shuddered as she thought this, but, though she shuddered, she knew that it was not her fault that she thought it. Since he had forced her to marry him when she did not love him, how could she wish, or even feign to wish, that he should live, and make the bond perpetual that bound her to him? It might be hard that she should have to long for his death, but yet it was he himself who had made that hard thing inevitable.

He slept all through the afternoon. Once, awakening and opening his eyes, he saw her sitting by him, and for a moment looked confused, and then smiled and murmured something that she could not hear, and with his hand made a motion towards her. For a moment she did not answer that silent appeal: she thought she might seem not to understand it; but then her heart rebuked her, and within her warm, strong, living fingers, she took his dying hand.

He sank to sleep again after that; and then the afternoon passed away, and the night came.

"He may live till morning: it is impossible to tell," Dr. Russell said in the evening, when he paid his last visit. "You can do nothing but go on as you have been doing—only get that poor girl to go to bed. She is beginning to look like a ghost. She doesn't think, does she, that because she is married to him now she is never to let him out of her sight?"

"I will do whatever you tell me," Anne answered submissively, when Mrs. Travers went to her, armed with this advice. "I will go to bed. I only want you to call me when—when—if any change comes."

"Of course we will do that."

"Or—if he should ask for me."

"Yes, if he should ask for you you shall be told at once."

"Then I will go." And so she went, and an hour afterwards Mrs. Travers stole softly into her room, and found her fast asleep.

The house was all quiet then. The nurse had taken up her post for the night in Mr. Faulkner's room.

"What do you think of him, nurse?" Mrs. Travers had asked the woman, coming away from the bedside, where she had been standing looking at the sleeping face.

"Well, ma'am," said the woman, "I don't see much change in him."

"So Dr. Russell says. But I suppose he is weaker?"

"I can't say, ma'am. I don't see that he is. But he's lying very easy and comfortable, poor dear."

"Yes, that is a great thing."

"You see, ma'am, he's got his mind at rest now. As long as he went on fretting



about marrying the young lady, why, there wasn't an hour's peace for him. But, bless you, when their minds gets at ease, it makes such a difference. I've known 'em take a turn that you'd no more have looked for than to see them fly."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Travers, rather faintly, and went out of the room presently, feeling rather as if she had had a blow.

"Nurse is talking about him taking a turn," she said abruptly to Mr. Travers, just as they were about to go together upstairs. And then Mr. Travers, who had got up from his seat, stood still and stared into his wife's face.

"I don't suppose she knows anything about it," he said quickly, after a little silence.

"No, I daresay she does not know much about it; but still—suppose she should be right?"

And then Mr. Travers gave a low whistle,

and took up his bedroom candlestick. How could he answer that question that his wife had asked ?


The night passed quietly. There was no change that she could see, the nurse still said, when the morning came. Once in the night Anne had started suddenly awake, and had hurriedly dressed herself, and gone to Mr. Faulkner's room, not knowing what the hour was, nor whether there was any need for her to rise, but urged to do it by the vague terror that that very uncertainty aroused ; but in the sick-room she found everything calm and still, the patient asleep, the night-light burning, the nurse dozing by the fire ; and she had gone silently away as she had come, half ashamed of the nervous restlessness that had brought her from her bed. " He has had an easy night ; he's been sleeping on and off. No, I don't see no change in him one way or the other,

ma'am," the nurse said, when morning came.

All through the day that followed, too, there seemed no other report to give but this. The doctor paid his morning and evening visits, and at each visit he said, "He is holding out ; he is not weaker."

"Is that all he says," Anne asked once ; and they answered—Yes, that was all. Perhaps they had been afraid to put any other question to him ; perhaps Anne was afraid to ask any other. It was a strange, long, silent day. The various people in the house seemed to avoid one another ; even Mr. and Mrs. Travers spoke very little together ; Anne for whole hours scarcely opened her lips. She sat a great deal in her husband's room, sometimes watching him while he slept, sometimes sitting back in her chair, and drawing the curtain between them. Hitherto she had taken no part in nursing him, but

to-day when the nurse gave him food or medicine she stood by her side and helped her. Once or twice she put her arm under his head to raise him. They let her do all that she liked, without either asking for her assistance or rejecting it. He remained conscious throughout the day, and if the knowledge that her presence was sweet to him could be any reward to her for the service that she gave him, such reward must have been hers abundantly; for he seemed to know the lightest touch of her hand—to be aware even when she only stood beside him. All day he lay calm and still, like a man who had finished his earthly work, and put all the trouble of his life away from him. The anxiety of the others did not seem to touch him, nor the fear of the others to be felt by him. He simply lay waiting for death, in a quiet that was unbroken alike by either hope or dread.



"He seems very easy," Mrs. Travers said to Anne late at night, and Anne merely answered "Yes." "What a blessing it is he does not suffer!" And again she answered "Yes," mechanically, and then turned away and went to her room. What was she thinking of as she went? The other wondered, looking after her with a troubled look in her eyes. But she said nothing, even to her husband. "I suppose we may all go to bed? We can do nothing more to-night," was all she said; and he merely assented with a grave face.

Again the night passed quietly, and the morning found the patient still lying in that placid state that was half exhaustion and half rest.

"Do you think he is any weaker, nurse?" Mrs. Travers asked anxiously when she rose; and the nurse at once shook her head.

"No, that he ain't, ma'am," she said cheerfully. "I'm certain he ain't. He mayn't be any better, but he ain't any worse."

"Do you really think that?"

"Well, I do, ma'am. I've been a-watching him all night, and I'm certain of it. He's as sensible and as clear in his head——"

"But he always has been perfectly clear in his head," Mr. Travers said impatiently, when this report was repeated to him presently by his wife. "The woman should know better than to suppose that clearness of head is any sign that a man is not going to die. Of course Russell will form his own opinion when he comes."

If Dr. Russell, however, formed his own opinion when he came he chose to be very reticent about expressing it.

"There is very little change—very little indeed. I'll bring Wilson" (this was the other medical man), "and see him again

early in the evening," was about all he said.

"You don't think he is worse this morning, do you?" Mrs. Travers contrived to ask, stopping him for a moment as he had his foot on the stairs.

"Well—no, I don't call him worse. He has had a good night. His pulse is not feebler. But I'll see you again presently. Nurse knows all she ought to do. Good morning," Dr. Russell said hurriedly, and ran down to his brougham. And then they were left alone again to the suspense of the long, monotonous hours.

Through almost the whole of the second day also Anne sat by her husband's side. "My dear, it can't do any good; you are wearing yourself out," Mrs. Travers said to her once; but she only shook her head.

"Let me stay. It keeps me still," she said.

She bent forward as she spoke, and looked at his face. In *her* heart there was so bitter a fight raging—so hard a struggle was going on, and *he* lay there still and calm, as if the troubled waters of life had all gone past him.

“I am better here. Do you not understand?” she said.

“You are always with me, my darling. Ought I not to let you go?” Mr. Faulkner had said yearningly to her a little while before.

“No, I *want* to stay,” she answered; and then he murmured some tender word or two, and prayed God to bless her.

All through the day he still asked no questions of her or anyone; no fear that death was retreating from him had entered *his* mind yet. “I have done everything now, thank God,” he had said, an hour after his marriage; and from that moment no



care for anything had seemed to trouble him. Perhaps he was too weak to count the hours, or to know that the end was longer in coming than they had looked for.

It was six in the evening when the two doctors came. "They want to see him alone," Mrs. Travers said to Anne. Mr. Faulkner was lying awake, and Anne, as she rose from her seat, bent down for a moment to speak to him.

"The doctors are coming in," she said.

"I would rather have you than the doctors," he answered.

"Would you?" She tried to give a little smile. She touched his hand before she turned away. Perhaps she remembered that faint smile, that momentary caress afterwards.

The doctors stayed with their patient for a good while. Anne had gone straight to

her own room ; she was not with Mr. and Mrs. Travers while they sat waiting for the visit to terminate. Hardly a word passed between the husband and wife while they were alone. Mr. Travers took up a newspaper and tried to read it ; Mrs. Travers sat doing nothing, looking into the fire.

At last the two men came into the room, and closed the door behind them. There was a curious look of embarrassment in their faces.

“We have been making an examination—” Dr. Russell began.

“A thorough examination,” struck in Mr. Wilson.

“Yes, a thorough examination—of Mr. Faulkner ; and, strange to say—most singular to say,—though we had not a doubt forty-eight hours ago that he was dying, we do not see now—upon my word we do not see now why he should not get over it.”

"Good heavens !" exclaimed Mr. Travers.

"There is no doubt that he is better. The paralysis is less—very decidedly less."

"It is not advancing, do you mean?"

"It is neither advancing nor is it so complete in the parts where it exists. It is a very remarkable case—a very remarkable case indeed. I never had a patient under my care of whom I would have said more unhesitatingly two days ago that he had no chance of recovery. But all human judgment is subject to error, and I am bound to tell you frankly, Mr. Travers, that in this instance I and my friend have both been mistaken."

"And you really think he may live?"

"He is not out of danger—not out of danger by any means; but undoubtedly he may live."

"Then we have made—a sad *fiasco* of it."

"I am afraid we have—I am afraid we

have. I am terribly grieved about it. If my friend here and I had not been so completely at one——”

“What are we to do, Frank?” Mrs. Travers said, ten minutes afterwards.

The colour had gone from her cheeks; her husband and she were standing face to face, looking blankly at one another. This friend of theirs, who was dear to them both, was about to escape from death, and it was with these looks of consternation that they received the news which surely ought to have made them glad. He was about to come back to them almost from the grave, and they could not rejoice, because of a girl who, a fortnight ago, had been a stranger to them both.

It was evening. The lamp was burning on the table, and the door had been closed after the doctors went away. They had been gone for a few minutes when another

hand re-opened it, and, pale and quiet, Anne came into the room.

The husband and wife were standing by the mantelpiece talking anxiously together. As Anne came in they started guiltily apart; in a nervous voice Mrs. Travers said something—she did not afterwards know what.

Anne's eyes went quickly from one face to another. Almost without a moment's pause—"Were you talking of Mr. Faulkner?" she said suddenly.

She joined them, and put out her hand, and laid it on Mrs. Travers's arm.

"You were talking of him, were you not? The doctors have told you something?" she said.

She spoke quickly: her tone was the tone of a challenge rather than of a question. Some vague thought of concealing the truth for a little while had for a

moment crossed Mrs. Travers's mind, but now, as she looked into Anne's keen, clear eyes, she felt that to conceal anything would be impossible. There was nothing to be done but to tell her what they knew, and to tell it in the simplest and fewest words.

"Yes, they have told us something," she said. "Anne, we would both give more than I could say if we had known it sooner. They have told us that it is possible that Mr. Faulkner may get well."

She had put her own hand over Anne's, and was holding it firmly and nervously. Perhaps she had expected that the girl would cry out—that she would faint, or make some scene. But she did not. She only stood for a few moments breathless, looking at them, her face becoming the colour of ashes. Then, all at once, she drew her hand forcibly from Mrs. Travers,

and turned away. They thought that she was going to leave the room, but she only went a step or two, and sank down into a chair.

“God help me!” she said, in a low, bitter, broken voice; and those three words were the only ones she spoke.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.





